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## **CITIZENS UNION REPORT FINDS 27 NEW YORK COUNTIES POSTED SAMPLE BALLOTS ONLINE PRIOR TO ELECTION DAY**

Numerous Ballot-Related Complaints from NYC Voters on Election Day Reveal Need for this Common-Sense Reform

*Citizens Union Repeats Call For City Board of Elections to Post Sample Ballots Online for Future Elections*

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An analysis released today by Citizens Union showed that the boards of elections in twenty-seven counties in New York State - representing almost half of all counties - posted sample ballots online for voters to familiarize themselves with the ballot and races prior to entering the polling place. The analysis also contained a map showing which counties post sample ballots online. Following complaints by voters throughout the City about the confusing format, lack of familiarity, and small font size of the NYC general and primary election ballots, Citizens Union again urges the Board of Elections in the City of New York (City Board) to post sample ballots online representing the races, candidates and referenda expected to appear on the ballot in advance of future elections.

The City Board of Elections has previously and repeatedly refused to post such sample ballots online, arguing that doing so would increase the likelihood of fraud and that ballots for some election and assembly districts are not finalized until just before the election.

"We heard many complaints on election day from voters about the ballot being difficult to see, about not being told of referenda on the back of the ballot, and about complex and confusing directions on the ballot. Posting a sample ballot online in advance of the election would help to address these issues. If voters can see exactly what their ballot will look like, they will be better prepared to accurately and completely cast their votes more quickly on Election Day. Had the City Board done so, many problems encountered at the poll sites could have been avoided," said Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union.

Citizens Union on Election Day this past Tuesday joined with its good government colleagues and the New York City Council, which has oversight authority over the City Board, in conducting surveys of New Yorkers exiting the polls on their voting experience. These exit surveys, which were supplemented by online ones, revealed that many voters reported the ballot being difficult to read, voters not being aware of the city charter revision questions on the back, and voters finding the directions on the ballot confusing. These survey findings were echoed in reports to major media outlets and the blogs that took accounts from voters on their experience at the polls.

"Posting a sample ballot online is a common-sense measure that is being done by twenty-six county boards of elections throughout the state," said Alex Camarda, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy. "From Warren to Niagara to Dutchess County, county boards are recognizing this is an important tool in better preparing voters for election day. It's inconceivable why the City Board has been unwilling to follow suit

and inform voters of what their ballot looks like before they actually go to vote."

Citizens Union did a comprehensive survey of every county in the state to determine which Boards of Elections post ballots online. Staff visited the websites of each county board of elections, and noted whether sample ballots were available, as well as the manner and form in which they were presented on the site. Several counties with large cities, including Monroe (Rochester), Onondaga (Syracuse), and Broome (Binghamton) all provide sample ballots online. In all instances, the sample ballots appeared to present the actual races and candidates expected to appear on the ballot.

"Of the twenty-seven boards of elections posting ballots online, eight demonstrate exceptional practices by linking the sample ballot to the poll site finder for users of the site," explained Rachael Fauss, Policy and Research Manager. "This enables voters to see the ballot that is tailored to their specific election and assembly district rather than a ballot that is very similar but may differ slightly from the one they will see on Election Day. Twenty of the twenty-seven boards also provide a link to the sample ballot on their home page, another feature that should be adopted by the City Board to make ballots most accessible to the public."

The analysis contains a chart that reveals which counties post sample ballots online, and the manner in which they are hosted and presented. Some of the county boards that do not tailor sample ballots to the exact election and assembly district of voters do provide multiple sample ballots for voters to access based on the political subdivision in which they live - by city, town, or ward.

Citizens Union and its good government colleagues - including the Brennan Center for Justice, Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY), Common Cause/NY, League of Women Voters of the City of New York, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), and the Women's City Club of New York - have long requested that the City Board put a sample ballot online. However, the City Board has not yet acted on these requests pointing to unsubstantiated concerns over fraud and more recently, late changes that can occur to ballots.

Citizens Union has testified before the City Council in the last month and met with Council members and staff on this issue, and is exploring ways with the Council to use its authority over the City Board's budget, if not its legislative authority, to require that it post a sample ballot online, in addition to other changes to improve the administration of elections following widespread problems during the Primary Election.

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Sample Ballot Map

Citizens Union of the City of New York, a nonpartisan force for good government for more than 100 years, works to inform and engage New Yorkers, to ensure local and state government values its citizens, addresses critical issues, and operates in a fair, open, and fiscally sound manner.

