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Citizens Union Pleased By City Board of Elections' Increased Transparency in 2012 Annual Report

*Good Government Group's Request for More Substantive
and Meaningful Annual Report Met*

*Includes In-Depth Operational
Data for Each Election Held This Past Year*

*Citizens Union Provides Its Own Analysis of High and Low Points;
Report Highlights Needed Legislative and Administrative Changes to
Improve Administration of Elections and Voter Engagement*

After years of requesting that the City Board of Elections produce an annual report that provides comprehensive data and is more useful in understanding how New Yorkers experience the process of voting, Citizens Union commends the Board of Elections in the City of New York (Board) for releasing a newly improved annual report on city elections administration. The 2012 report provides detailed information about the Board's operations, substantially more data on the Board's performance, and an array of fascinating and helpful statistics on voting behavior and trends. Citizens Union worked collaboratively with the Board since 2010 to produce an informative report that reveals more data and provides a way in which the public can measure and evaluate the board's operations. Citizens Union has made numerous data requests in recent years that were largely met through release of the 2012 annual report.

From the new statistics and information provided in the report by the Board, Citizens Union compiled 2012 high points and low points regarding the performance of the Board and agencies involved in election administration. This data also points to needed changes in election law and its implementation.

Performance High Points

- 1. The Board processed 642,460 voter registration forms during 2012, including 297,290 forms between mid-September and mid-October**, more than the entire number of forms processed in 2011. Voter registration, likely because 2012 was a presidential year, was up dramatically across most sources of registration including agencies, CUNY, borough offices, and the board's

headquarters.

2. **The Board's technology upgrades have been utilized by the public.** The poll site locator on its website received 648,395 clicks, or 15 percent of all registered voters. 10,000 voters have downloaded the poll site locator app to their phones which also allows for sharing and viewing sample ballots.
3. **The Board's election night reporting of unofficial results using portable memory devices (PMDs) from the scanner was a success.** Data was received from 97 percent of the PMDs transmitting results from the fall elections, and error rates were far lower than the old manual approach of tallying and entering results by hand when compared to the recanvass of machines under the new electronic reporting system. With accuracy improved, reporting should now be made quicker.
4. **27,000 new poll workers were recruited, and more than 1 in 10 who worked on primary and general election day this fall were new workers.** Overall more than 100,000 poll workers were recruited with 67,787 receiving training.
5. **The percentage of inspector vacancies dropped for all elections from 14.71 percent in 2011 to 10.95 percent in 2012.**

Performance Low Points

1. **The number of poll sites opening late during the presidential election numbered 43 or 3.56 percent.** Long lines were also a problem but disappointingly no data is made available or tracked regarding this issue. Wait times longer than 30 minutes are prohibited and it would have been good to know the board's performance in this area.
2. **Vacancies for the poll worker inspector position (the main poll worker position) ranged from 6.89 percent to 13.61 percent for elections conducted in 2012.**
3. **Exposing great inefficiencies in staffing placement the ratio of poll workers to voters ranged wildly from poll site to poll site.** During the general election in November, the St. Stephen of Hungary Parish poll site in Manhattan had 267 voters per worker while at least five other sites across the city actually had more workers than voters, and one site at Palm Gardens in Brooklyn had 9 workers and 0 voters! The Board should compile and analyze this data to better allocate additional poll workers to high volume sites. The voter kiosk recently unveiled by the Board should assist with staffing placement.
4. **The City has just 2,816 military and overseas voters, yet the failure of the state legislature to agree on one primary day for federal and state elections cost the city \$9.27 million to hold an extra election, or \$3,290 per registered military and overseas voter.**
5. **Only five 17-year olds in the entire city of New York in 2012 pre-registered to vote, a decline from 11 in 2011, despite the law which allows 17-year olds turning 18 in the same calendar year to register to vote before they are 18 years old.** This abysmally low number indicates that the board needs to do more outreach to 17-year olds who are eligible to register, and the Department of Education needs to more robustly implement the Young Adult Voter Registration Act of 2004 which requires they give registration forms to seniors at graduation.

The report provides new data and information and raises the transparency of board operations and

performance. It includes information such as:

Election Data

- In-depth data for each of the elections held this year including the Republican presidential primary, the federal June primary, the primary for state offices in September, the general election in November for the U.S. presidency, and a special state senate election in Brooklyn. The Board in the recent past only provided aggregated information for all elections during the calendar year of its annual report.
- The costs of each election held during the year, including expenditures associated with mailings, printing, poll workers (including itemized data for interpreters (p. 39¹) and other cost drivers (p. 54)).

Poll Worker and Poll Site Data


- Comprehensive information on the recruitment of poll workers, including for each source how many workers were recruited, received training and actually worked (p. 42 and pgs. 254-267). The report also includes number of poll workers recruited by district leaders in the aggregate from each borough for each election (p. 40).
- Detailed appendices showing at every poll site for each election during the calendar year: 1) the ratio of poll workers to voters (beginning on p. 63); 2) the number of vacant inspector/poll clerk positions (summary on p. 38, per poll site data beginning on p. 126); and 3) the numbers of interpreters (beginning on p. 190).
- The number of poll workers in stand-by pools to fill the slots of poll workers who did not show up to work (p. 34), and the number utilized (p. 41).
- The number and proportion of new poll workers who worked for each election held during the year (p. 36).
- The number of poll workers who worked part of the day on Election Day (p. 37).
- The number of poll sites opening late for each election held during the year (p. 44).
- Data related to the petitioning process, the number of challenges to Board rulings on the eligibility of candidates to appear on the ballot (p. 15).

Other Data

- Information showing each type of ballot cast (at the poll site recorded by the scanner, emergency, affidavit, absentee, etc.) for each election held during the calendar year (pgs 18-22).
- Statistics revealing for the first time how frequently the poll site locator was used, the mobile poll site locator app was downloaded, and the website was visited (p. 24).
- Data on campaign finance disclosure forms received by the City Board (most campaign finance data goes to the State Board of Elections and the Campaign Finance Board) (p. 15).

Citizens Union commends the Board for more robustly reporting on its operations in its 2012 annual report. Data like this should be provided by agencies and the Office of Management and Budget as part of budgetary materials for review by the Council and the public, and put in the city's Open Data portal, as should the data sets behind this annual report. Even with these improvements in the 2012 annual report, however, the Board needs to establish goals and targets to measure its performance. The annual report also lacks information on certain significant shortcomings like the reasons behind the late certification of the official results following the November general election.

¹All page numbers are based on the page number shown in the enclosed box in the Adobe Acrobat Reader that electronically opens the Board's annual report. Actual page numbers on the report itself are different in some instances and some pages in the report lack a page number altogether.



[Citizens Union](#) is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public.

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