

Member Update

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**Citizens Union Proposes Eliminating Board of Elections
 Urges End to Industrial Age Patronage and
 Fresh Start with Information Age Accountability**

*Structural Change to Election Administration Aimed at Reforming Arcane System
 Good Government Group Releases a Series of Recommendations to Improve Voting and Reform Elections that Can
 be Made Now without Changing the State Constitution*

Citizens Union today recommended significant changes to the way in which elections are run and votes are cast in New York. The historic good government group urged that New York State create a new nonpartisan system that ends the two political party management of elections and brings needed accountability and stronger integrity to the administration of elections. It also put forward a number of proposals to increase voter turnout and enfranchise a larger number of voters.

The recommendations were presented in the executive summary of a report by the Citizens Union Foundation which has spent the past several years researching the issue of election reform and examining how other states and municipalities manage elections. Based on this research Citizens Union Foundation proposed a new model form of nonpartisan election administration in New York.

Chief among the nearly sixty recommendations is the creation of a Chief Election Officer and new nine member State Election Board that replaces the current patronage laden Board of Elections model. On the local level, the county executive or in the case of New York City, the Mayor, would appoint a Chief Local Election Officer who would work with an appointed Board of Canvassers.

New York is only one of two states in the country that still has an even-numbered bipartisan board of elections and provides in its state constitution a role for political parties in its elections.

Some of the other recommendations are:

- Add a fifth nonpartisan commissioner to the State Board or an eleventh at the City Board until such time as the State Constitution is amended.
- Better use of improved technology so voters can see sample ballots on the board websites prior to Election Day and receive email notifications of election dates, deadlines and other useful information.
- Ask New York State to fund development of its own scanner system if it fully adopts optical scan technology instead of relying upon private companies that are finding it difficult to do so.
- Create greater accountability by requiring that the local boards provide information, on performance, similar to how it is tracked as part of the preliminary and final Mayor's Management Report in New York City.
- Amend the State Constitution to remove the ten-day advance voter registration requirement to allow for Election Day voter registration.

- Amend the State Constitution to allow no-excuse absentee voting by removing the requirement that one must be ill, physically disabled, or out of the jurisdiction to cast an absentee ballot.
- Institute early voting to allow voters greater opportunities within a defined period of time to cast their ballots earlier than Election Day.
- Use affidavit ballots to create and update voter registration records.
- Translate election materials into additional languages.

Dick Dadey, executive director of Citizens Union said, "New Yorkers have long decried the operations of the Board of Elections in the management of the elections, and with these recommendations today, Citizens Union has provided the first comprehensive roadmap for reforming New York's election system. New Yorkers who have grown accustomed to getting cash from ATMs are still voting on machines that were first introduced in New York in 1892. And though New Yorkers can go online and see how to drive from New York to Buffalo, they can't go online to see a sample ballot before walking into the voting booth. It is time for the old industrial age system of patronage to be scrapped and a new system suitable for the information age to be formed."

DeNora Getachew, Director of Public Policy and Legislative Counsel for Citizens Union said "New York's election system needs to be benched. The state must substitute the current system with a new, functional election administration system with the experience and credibility that has proven effective nation- and worldwide. Citizens Union's proposal to use a chief elections officer - nonpartisan board model will not only move New York in line with other election administration systems, but eliminate the two-party system that continues to stymie meaningful election reform."

Rachel Fauss, CU's Policy and Research Associate remarked, "Regardless of whether major constitutional and structural changes are made, New York must implement merit-based hiring of agency personnel and poll workers, create statewide standards for poll worker training and ballots, improve public access to information and voter education, require performance measurement, and strengthen campaign finance enforcement by separating campaign finance enforcement from election administration. These changes will create more accountability and make a difference to New Yorkers in their experiences at the poll site."

Andrea Senteno, "States across the country have found ways to implement innovative solutions to boost voter participation through measures like, Election Day registration and early voting. New York's outdated election administration structure has limited the ability to implement some of those same programs and prohibited our ability to vote more conveniently. New Yorkers lead busy lives and should be able to cast a ballot, register to vote, and obtain vital voter information with ease."

The [executive summary](#) and detailed list of specific recommendations are available online at citizensunion.org. The report in its full and final form will be released by May 29.

Citizens Union of the City of New York is an independent, non-partisan civic organization dedicated to promoting good government and political reform in the city and state of New York. For more than a century, Citizens Union has served as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good. Founded in 1897 to fight the corruption of Tammany Hall, Citizens Union currently works to ensure fair elections, clean campaigns, and open, effective government that is accountable to the citizens of New York. We do so by informing the policy debate and

influencing the policy outcomes that affect the lives of all New Yorkers.



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.

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