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Citizens Union Welcomes Decision by City Board of Elections to Make Ballot More Readable by Increasing Font Size

Most New Yorkers will no longer have to squint or use a magnifying glass to read their election ballot when they vote. The City Board of Elections today voted to limit the number of required languages on voters' ballots to three – down from as many as five in previous elections – paving the way for increasing the font size of candidates' names and removing unnecessary clutter from the ballot.

Citizens Union commends the decision, having long advocated for ballots tailored to the language preferences of individual voters. The font size for candidates' names on the general election ballot in 2013 was a tiny six-point font, frustrating voters who instead had to rely on clumsy magnifying sheets to read the ballot. The ballots for this year's election will now have an increased font size of 10 point as a result of the decision, 67 percent larger than the 2013 general election ballot.

The decision will result in voters in Queens being offered three different types of ballot: 1) an English-Spanish-Chinese ballot; 2) an English-Spanish-Korean ballots; or 3) an English-Spanish-Bengali ballot. Voters who prefer a ballot with Chinese, Korean or Bengali will choose the corresponding ballot. Those with no language preference will be given ballots randomly to ensure that the voting patterns of particular language groups of voters cannot be discerned. Voters within the other four boroughs will receive the same ballot but the font size will be larger because the font size is uniform across all ballots in the city. Only Queens has 5 required languages at particular poll sites whereas the other boroughs have fewer required languages on the ballot.

Citizens Union and our good government partners in April 2012 sent [a letter to the City Board of Elections](#) requesting it make the administrative change to ballots with fewer languages so the font size of candidates' names could be increased. It subsequently met with the Board's staff four times between August 2012 and January 2014 to further discuss changes to ballot design, including limiting the number of languages on the ballot.

While the improvements the Board made today are a step forward, Citizens Union seeks further reforms to the design of the ballot to make it even more readable and functional for voters, including passage in the state legislature of the Voter Friendly Ballot Act ([A204A/S5350A](#)) sponsored by Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh and State Senator Marty Golden. The Voter Friendly Ballot Act will simplify instructions on the ballot and provide visual directions, establish a minimum font size, allow for shading between sections of the ballot, require online sample ballots in advance of Election Day among other changes. The bill has passed the Assembly this session and last and is awaiting action in the State Senate.

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