Citizens Union's Statement on the 2020 Elections During the COVID-19 Outbreak

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in New York State and New York City, elections planned to be held in 2020 are at risk. Citizens Union acknowledges the necessity to take extraordinary measures to protect public health and reduce community transmission of the coronavirus but urges the New York State Legislature and Board of Elections to maintain the regular functioning of elections planned for 2020. Keeping our democratic principles is particularly crucial in moments of emergency.

We call the New York State Legislature and Board of Elections to take the following steps:

1) **Consolidate the April Presidential Primary with the State and Federal Primary Elections on June 23rd**. We do not see the state as giving up leverage in the party nomination process by making this change.
2) Amend the election law to define "illness" in Article II, Section 2 of the state constitution (the Absentee Ballot provision) to encompass the presence of the COVID-19 virus and the risk of contagion, **so that all registered voters who want to vote by mail can do so**. This provision should expire at the later of December 31, 2020 or when the widespread contagion risk of COVID-19 has passed.
3) Prepare for the prospect of all-mail ballot elections. **Implement immediate programs to facilitate absentee voting**, including a public education campaign, online application for absentee ballots, and other measures.
4) **Do not eliminate in-person voting**. Maintain as many open polling places as feasible for early voting and on electionday, while providing the resources, equipment, and guidelines needed to maintain the health of poll workers and voters.
5) **Allow the existing online voter registration system** developed by the New York City Campaign Finance Board to be accessed by New York City voters, and facilitate easier voter registration across the state.
6) **Consider a range of possibilities to facilitate voting**; for example, mailing a ballot to all registered voters, changing the deadline to postmark an absentee ballot, and increasing the number of drop-off locations.

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