

February 27, 2023

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker
New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248

Re: FY 2023-24 Budget Proposals Relating to Election Administration and Voting

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

The Let NY Vote Coalition appreciates the opportunity to share our views regarding adequate FY 2023-24 funding levels necessary to ensure modern, high-quality election administration at New York's state and local boards of elections.

We recognize and commend the Legislature for its leadership in improving New York election administration in recent years, from reducing barriers to voter registration, providing more convenient balloting options, adding due process to protect rights and ensure legitimate votes are counted, and enacting measures to ensure the integrity and accuracy of election results. Administrators now need the necessary resources to implement recent reforms, and to procure and maintain the equipment to administer modern elections. It is past time that New York joined the many states which provide on-going funding for election administration to localities.

Our coalition supports the following FY 2023-24 budget proposals:

- **\$20 million for local election administration:** We support the New York State Election Commissioner Association's bipartisan request for \$20 million for local election administration in the FY 2023-24 budget. Though we believe more is needed and encourage the Legislature to consider sustained annual funding on par with other populous and diverse states, we urge you to include this minimum amount so that local boards may make the upgrades necessary to effectively run our elections. Elections are often the last item on the list when it comes to county budgets and many county boards operate with limited resources to implement vital changes to the election law. New York State must play a role in funding local election administration. This request includes:
 - **\$10 million in capital funding** for procurement and/or reimbursement of new voting equipment (e-poll books, ballot printers, ballot scanners, ballot-marking devices, high-speed scanners, and related digital security, power, and connectivity devices).

- **\$10 million in aid to localities** to support the recent changes to election law, including the expansion of early voting, college campus poll site requirements, and the recently reduced voter registration deadline creating one day of same-day registration on the first day of early voting. These funds will help local boards hire and train staff and poll workers, upgrade old systems, and establish new poll sites.
- **\$2.5 million for the state and local boards to conduct voter outreach, media campaigns, and civic education** to encourage participation in elections; inform the public of upcoming contests, key deadlines, and balloting options; and, to educate voters regarding the major recent changes to voting laws and the safeguards to ensure due process. This initiative will help improve parity of election administration and establish a baseline for voter access for all New York voters regardless of where they live.
 - We recommend that 20% of this funding (\$500,000) should be reserved for the State Board of Elections to develop ‘model’ or ‘template’ civic engagement materials in accordance with recommendations and best practices from civic design professionals, disseminated as both a statewide campaign, as well as to local boards in furtherance of these goals. The remaining \$2 million should be made available to the local boards pursuant to a formula determined by the State Board of Elections.
- **\$16.6 million for Automatic Voter Registration Implementation:** We support the appropriation of \$16.6 million in the executive budget for the State Board of Elections to implement and launch the long-awaited Automatic Voter Registration system, board-hosted online voter registration, and a statewide ballot tracking tool that includes the status of ballot “cures” and affidavits (provisional ballots). We ask the Legislature to include this funding in the one-house budgets so that these programs, all of which are required by law to be deployed for elections in 2023, can successfully launch.
- **\$5 million for John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York implementation:** In 2022, New York emerged as a national leader in restoring legal protections against race-based voter discrimination by passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (NYVRA). This historic law brings this state one step closer to ensuring all New Yorkers have a meaningful voice in our politics. We urge the legislature to fully fund the NYVRA and to include its companion database bill ([S657/A885A](#)) in the budget. The database bill already passed the Senate with bipartisan support in January and will create the New York Voting and Elections Database and Institute (NYVEDI), a central, public repository for election and demographic data administered and maintained by our public university systems. NYVEDI will foster unprecedented transparency in New York’s elections and facilitate evidence-based election administration across the state. We

encourage the Legislature to include the database bill in their one house budgets and to allocate \$5 million to fully fund both the implementation of the voting and elections database (\$2.4 million) and the NYVRA's preclearance components in the Office of the Attorney General (\$2.6 million).

- **\$114.5 million for the new, voluntary statewide public financing program:** We support the Public Campaign Finance Board's (PCFB) request of \$114.5 million for FY 2023-24, including \$14.5 million for program administration and \$100 million for matching funds. We commend the executive budget for meeting the PCFB's request of \$14.5 million for administrative needs. We urge the Legislature to maintain this commitment in the final Budget, which will enable the agency to hire staff and implement the technology necessary to put the program on a firm foundation for candidates who choose to participate. But by providing only \$25 million for matching funds – one quarter of the agency's request – the executive budget fails to cement a commitment to the reform. With the first cycle of the program already underway, a greater commitment of matching funds will give prospective candidates — and voters who wish to engage as small donors — confidence in the program's future.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership improving voter access and modernizing our elections, and for your consideration of this request. The Let NY Vote Coalition stands ready to assist in improving the quality of New York election administration and safeguarding civil rights.

Sincerely,

Betsy Gotbaum, Executive Director
Citizens Union

Joanna Zdanys, Senior Counsel
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law

Susan Lerner, Executive Director
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Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director
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Karen Wharton, Democracy Coalition Coordinator
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Jarret Berg, Voting Rights Counsel
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Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., Executive Director
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cc:

Senator Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Budget & Finance Committee
Assembly Member Helene E. Weinstein, Chair Assembly Ways & Means Committee