

**TESTIMONY OF SUSAN LERNER
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TO THE 2024 JOINT BUDGET HEARING ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS/GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

February 6, 2024

The New York State Legislature has repeatedly demonstrated its ongoing commitment to expanding voting rights and improving elections throughout the state over the last five years. Common Cause New York has been a longtime champion of these pro-voter reforms and remains a staunch advocate of building on our collective successes and ensuring these reforms can be easily implemented by counties. This year, we encourage the State Legislature to:

PROVIDE ONGOING, DEDICATED APPROPRIATIONS FOR OPERATIONAL COSTS TO THE COUNTY BOARDS OF ELECTIONS

As we have noted in years prior, with new reforms comes new expenses and the expansion of voting rights should not be a series of perennially unfunded mandates. New York remains one of the few states that does not dedicate ongoing operational funding for election administration. Unfortunately, this puts many counties in a bind and their vital work is chronically underfunded.

We urge both the Senate and Assembly to include a new Local Government appropriation for county Board of Elections' operating costs in an amount no less than \$10 million in their respective one-house budgets.

ALLOCATE FUNDS FOR A ONE TIME VOTER NOTIFICATION OF NEW VOTE BY MAIL RIGHT

The 2024 election cycle marks the first time New Yorkers will be able to exercise their new right to vote by mail. Last year, this Legislature took voting rights another monumental step forward by expanding the franchise and giving New Yorkers the opportunity to vote by mail. All voters will be eligible to request a ballot if they would prefer to securely vote by mail. However, there has been little publicity and most voters are more than likely unaware that they can.

As we've already seen in the Special Election in Congressional District 3, the first election cycle to use vote by mail, candidates see the value and are already encouraging voters to use it.¹ In anticipation of a busy election year, counties should proactively notify voters of their newfound rights, and the Senate and Assembly should each allocate a minimum of an additional \$5 million to cover the cost of a mailing in their respective one-house budgets.

FUND THE BUDGET REQUESTS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS OF THE NEW YORK STATE ELECTIONS COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION (NYSECA)²

County Boards of Elections know what they need to safely and securely administer New York's elections during a busy election year. We wholeheartedly echo their requests for:

- \$10 million Aid to Localities grant to hire temporary workers and fund informational campaigns for the 2024 election cycle.
- An annual funding stream, as we note above, to support the cost of local election administration.

MATCH THE GOVERNOR'S COMMITMENT TO THE PCFB

We applaud the Executive Budget's commitment to fully funding the New York State Public Campaign Finance Program (PCFP) for FY 2024-25. It provides \$114.5 million for the program, including \$14.5 million for administrative costs and \$100 million for public matching funds. The governor's proposed budget will provide the funds needed to support the program's first run in the 2024 state legislative elections. We urge you to support this figure in your one-house budgets and ensure it is included in the final budget.

It is essential that the PCFB receives adequate funding for both administration and matching funds this year to help the program reach its full potential. It is the strongest reform enacted anywhere in the nation to counter the outsized influence of wealth in our politics. Full funding will enable the agency to ensure candidate and voter confidence in

¹ Gothamist, [Why Wait? Meet some of the very early voters in the race to replace Santos](#), 1/31/24.

² Testimony from Dustin Czarny, NYSECA Democratic Caucus Chair, Commissioner (D), Onondaga County.

the program's solvency. It will also assure campaigns that they can plan their fundraising strategies around collecting small contributions from constituents instead of large donors.