

# Legislative Public Hearing: to discuss the implementation of early voting throughout New York State

Testimony before  
The New York State Senate Standing Committee on Elections  
and  
The New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law



**Brooklyn Voters Alliance**

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## **Brooklyn Voters Alliance: Early Voting was a success**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the implementation of early voting throughout New York State. I and other members of Brooklyn Voters Alliance were present when this reform passed the legislature in January and are pleased to share that it was a resounding success in Brooklyn, the rest of the five boroughs and all across the state.

Voters had positive experiences, there were little to no wait times and the entire process for the voters was smooth and efficient. In New York City, a huge part of that was due to the incredible work of the NYC Board of Elections who bought new equipment, secured new poll sites, designed new processes and hired and trained new poll workers in a short amount of time. While voting, voters were helped with where to go, what to do and how to do it. At each encounter, positivity radiated, making it a celebratory experience - something very new for most New York voters. Voters were thanked for coming, given “I Voted Early” stickers and wrist bands - and other swag while it lasted. While the swag was in the official NYC BOE procedures, the rest of it - the gratitude, the celebration - was a spontaneous effort on the part of poll workers to make the experience joyful.

And that is another major part of the successful implementation of early voting - the front-line contributions of poll workers. While voting is a right and the foundation of all other rights, it is also a transaction. Voters present themselves at polling sites, give their name or voter card to call up their record, sign an ePollbook, get a ballot, are shown to a privacy booth or ballot marking device and then to a scanner to cast their ballot. That is a lot of interactions in a short amount of time. It could all go horribly wrong. But in this first rollout of early voting, it did not. Instead, most voters shared that “I voted early and it was a joy!”

Early voting worked because legislators passed this law, election officials implemented it, grassroots groups like ours educated voters about it and yes, because poll workers did their jobs and more - they made it fun and a positive experience.

## **More training for poll workers needed**

All of this is not to say there are no improvements to be had. We agree with the reforms already suggested - making early voting poll sites borough-wide, or even city-wide, voting centers in NYC, more conveniently located poll sites, as well as just more poll sites themselves. For example, Brooklyn has the most registered voters and had the most designated polling sites—double that of Manhattan, in fact—yet did not have the most voters during early voting, probably due to the lack of easy transportation to all of the sites. The poll site I worked at was in Downtown Brooklyn, a place where many people

work and we had voters coming in every day, asking if they could vote; in most cases, we had to let them know they were assigned to a different site (sometimes in another borough). I hope those individuals went on to vote early or on Election Day, but that was certainly a missed opportunity. Making voting more accessible and convenient for voters is a goal of early voting and voting centers would help make that a reality for more voters. BVA is also advocating for increased voter outreach, especially by Boards of Election. As I mentioned earlier, voter and poll worker interactions make or break the voting experience, so we are also advocating for increased and more targeted poll worker training.

Senator Comrie has a bill (S2800/A5142 - sponsored in the Assembly by AM Walker) that would establish a mandatory training curriculum for election commissioners, the staff of Boards of Elections and poll workers. We hope this bill will be taken up by your committees in the new session. It will help future implementation efforts, especially for what is anticipated to be high-turnout elections in 2020, to have the Commissioners and BOE staff have a clear understanding of how the voting process works, so we applaud this effort to include them in the training.

While poll workers can make voting joyous, it also was obvious - at least to me, who worked as a poll worker during the early voting period - that not all poll workers were familiar with voter's rights, sometimes mistakenly asking for "voter ID" when they meant the voter card mailed out by the NYC BOE, for example. This latest election period, I also was called to explain some basic civics knowledge - why are there different types of judges? Why are we voting to change the city charter? - that could and should be included in poll worker training.

This year's poll worker training had to accommodate the very helpful hands-on training for the ePollbooks, so the focus on how to help voters with disabilities was extremely limited, if not missing in its entirety. There is a voter's rights section in the poll worker manual, but due to time constraints, this section was not covered in the class I attended at all. And no basics civics knowledge has ever been covered in any class any BVA member who has worked as a poll worker has ever attended.

## **Conclusion**

Brooklyn Voters Alliance is ready to continue educating the public on early voting in New York City and New York State and we look forward to more election reforms that make voting more accessible in 2020 and beyond. Thank you.