



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

TESTIMONY OF THE FIRST DEPUTY PUBLIC ADVOCATE OF POLICY NICK SMITH TO THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS ON NEW YORK CITY'S EARLY VOTING ROLLOUT

Good morning. My name is Nick E. Smith, and I am happy to represent the Public Advocate as his First Deputy for Policy. I would like to thank Chair Fernando Cabrera and the Committee on Government Operations for holding an oversight hearing on New York City's Early Voting Rollout.

Early voting affords individuals the opportunity to cast their ballot during the eight days prior to an election. This past November, 61 polling sites were opened early and 60,110 New Yorkers took advantage of the expanded window, voting for key charter changes and selecting candidates to fill crucial government positions. On Election Day, congestion was relieved and poll workers had more freedom to assist constituents.

As this was the first time early voting was utilized in the city, there is now the opportunity to build upon its successes and make improvements to strengthen the election process for the future. Parents, school administrators, and teachers have raised concerns about security and facility access during the eight days of early voting so it is critical that non-school sites be identified to serve as early voting locations. Additionally, all of the early voting sites that are selected must be made accessible for individuals with disabilities. The City should also expand public education efforts to share where polling sites are, how individuals can check to see if they are registered, the dates and times which polling sites are open, and inform the public that early voting ballots are the same as those used on Election Day.

Furthermore, voter suppression, intimidation, and disenfranchisement continues in this country and it is critical that the State takes the necessary steps to protect our voters and election integrity. Currently, 21 states provide same-day voter registration and New York should follow their example by providing individuals the opportunity to register during early voting or on Election Day. Additionally, the affidavit ballot form needs to be clarified to indicate that in New York City, voters can move between boroughs and are still eligible to vote on the full ballot at their new polling place. With the 2020 election rapidly approaching, it is essential that the Board of Elections and the State act quickly with intention to clarify election protocols and institute measures to enfranchise voters.

As a representative from the Office of the Public Advocate, I encourage this body to take the necessary steps to expand and protect the ability of individuals to exercise their democratic right to vote. Again, thank you to this committee and the committee members for discussing this important matter.