



The League of Women Voters of New York State
62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207
Phone: 518-465-4162 Fax: 518-465-0812
www.lwvny.org E-Mail: lwvny@lwvny.org

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2019-2020 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL PUBLIC PROTECTION

TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT FISCAL COMMITTEES OF THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

January 29th, 2019

Hearing Room B, Legislative Office Building, Albany, New York

Introduction

Each year, the League of Women Voters of New York State submits testimony to the Joint Legislative Committee on Public Protection regarding New York State's antiquated election infrastructure and operations. This year, we are pleased that the state Legislature has already passed a package of voting reforms to address many of these issues. We congratulate both houses for being so swift in passing these much needed reforms.

Although we are happy to see these reforms signed into law, we implore the Senate and Assembly to allocate funding for these reforms to prevent an unfunded mandate on county governments. The Legislature should include sufficient funding in their final budget proposals for this year and future years to support a smooth transition to implementing these critical voting reforms.

Early Voting Cost

Last year the Governor's office estimated early voting would cost the state \$7 million. Although this was a reasonable projection at the time, the League has conducted more research on the state's actual cost projection for early voting. After taking into account several cost factors and the policy which has been signed into law, the League estimates **the base cost of early voting in New York State, for a November 2019 implementation date, without technology upgrades, would be as much as \$9.3 million.**

The League has identified five major cost drivers associated with early voting. These costs include poll sites, staffing and training, voting equipment, security, and voter education.

1) Poll Sites

It is difficult to predict the exact cost of poll sites within New York State but it is possible to predict the number of early voting poll sites that will appear within the state. Based on the new legislative mandate, the State Board of Elections estimates that the state will have a total of 145 early voting polling locations.¹ Of the 62 counties, only 40 will be required to open a single poll site. These counties could arguably utilize their county board of elections office as a poll site. The remaining 22

¹ The New York State Board of Elections. Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law. November 15, 2018.

counties will require a total of 105 sites, with the assumption that each county will utilize their county board of elections as one of their designated polling locations, the total number of sites is lowered to 83.

Currently, one third of county boards do not pay for poll sites, those that do pay at least \$100 per site, per day and potentially as much as \$200.² Based on this estimate, the **total cost of poll site rental could be between \$74,700 and \$149,400 per election.**

Poll Site	
83 Locations	
9 days of early voting	
\$200	
\$	149,400

2) Staffing and Training

The State Board of Elections reported that the average pay for election inspectors is approximately \$200 per day. Inspectors will also require training for which they will be paid an estimated \$100. For the 145 early voting sites, with an assumption of a minimum number of 10 inspectors per poll site, per day, **the estimated cost for poll workers would be \$2,755,000 per election.**

Staffing	Training		
\$200 per day	\$100 (onetime payment)		
9 days	10 inspectors		
10 inspectors	145 sites		
145 sites			<u>Total:</u>
\$2,610,000	\$145,000		\$2,755,000

3) Voting Equipment

New York State's current voting machines are becoming outdated and inefficient. Voting machines for early voting will need to process a larger number of ballot styles because many election districts will be housed at a single poll location. Some counties may need to purchase additional equipment to account for these differences.

An essential component that would greatly benefit New York State's early voting period is electronic poll books. Electronic poll books will allow greater ease and accuracy during the early voting period. These electronic voter rolls will have long term cost savings after their initial investment. There are several vendors who provide electronic poll books for states; a report by Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections estimated the average price per electronic poll book device is \$1,156.³ If only taking the 145 early voting poll sites into account, the cost of two electronic poll books per site would be \$335,240. The true estimation for the cost of electronic poll books will be far beyond this amount. There are additional costs outside of poll book hardware including program software, cyber security,

² The New York State Board of Elections. Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law. November 15, 2018.

³ "Today's e-poll Books: What's New What's Not What's Missing" Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections. <https://www.myfloridaelections.com/portals/fsase/documents/Todays%20e-Poll%20Books.pdf>

and training.

Without knowing the exact proposal for electronic poll books in New York State the League cannot recommend a cost estimate but believes they are critical to realizing the promise of early voting.

4) Security

Security costs associated with early voting account for both, security of the ballot and security of the poll site itself. Several counties utilize local police or sheriffs on Election Day. For counties not utilizing their local board of elections office as a poll location, voting machines and ballots will need to be secured either by returning the machines to a secure location or by a hired officer. A reasonable estimate of the rate for a security officer is around \$30 per hour. Assuming each of the 145 sites will utilize one officer per day of early voting, the **estimated cost for general security is \$304,500**. This cost estimate accounts for five hour weekend early voting (assuming time and a half for weekends) and eight hours of weekday early voting.

Using these same considerations, the additional cost for overnight election equipment security could be as much as **\$1,070,100** bringing the **total cost of security personnel to \$1,374,600 per election**. This cost does not take into account cost savings if counties utilize their own offices and do not require security. However, this cost also does not account for secure transportation of ballots and voting machines should counties choose to house them at alternate locations during off hours.

Security General		Security Over Night			
\$30 per hour	\$45 for weekends (time and a half)		\$45 (time and a half)		
8 hour week day	5 hour weekend		16 hour week day	21 hour weekend	
5 days	4 days		5 days	4 days	
145 sites	145 sites	Total	145 sites	145 sites	Total
\$ 174,000	\$ 130,500	\$ 304,500	\$ 522,000	\$ 548,100	\$ 1,070,100
					Total:
					\$ 1,374,600

5) Voter Education

This year it will be crucial to alert voters to these new policy changes. Boards of Elections typically mail voters an informational notice each year. In 2012, the Board reported spending \$3,621,750 on mailings to voters.⁴ The Board also noted that larger mailings to voters could cost as much as **\$5,048,500**.

There would be a need for additional educational measures but these could be provided for free in the form of media notices and through advocacy groups.

⁴ The New York State Board of Elections. Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law. November 15, 2018.

	General Election 2019
Poll Site	\$149,400.00
Staffing and Training	\$2,755,000.00
Security	\$1,374,600.00
Voter Education	\$5,048,500.00
Total	\$9,327,500.00

Conclusion

The actual estimate projected by the League to **implement early voting for the 2019 general election is \$9,327,500**. Although this cost estimate may seem initially high, after implementation of early voting this amount will greatly reduce over time. Additionally, now that the legislature has passed a reform to allow for consolidated primaries the state will be seeing a significant cost savings in election administrations. The New York State Board of Elections estimated a projected savings between \$25 and 45 million.⁵

The Legislature should consider making an addition investment in technology upgrades, including electronic poll books, to assist localities with implementing early voting. A **matched investment of \$9.3 million** would be enough funding to cover the cost of software upgrades and new election equipment.

We want to once again thank the Legislature for their work on passing early voting in New York State. With proper funding, early voting will greatly increase New York’s low rates of voter turnout and ensure everyone has ample opportunity to cast their ballot. Proper funding will allow for high security of election equipment and ballot sanctity. The time has finally come for New York to join 38 other states and implement early voting in 2019.

⁵ The New York State Board of Elections. Testimony Before the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law. November 15, 2018.