

Budget Forum Testimony  
March 2, 2019  
By Elise Nakhnikian

Good afternoon, and thanks for this opportunity.

I'm a grassroots member of the Let New York Vote coalition. I'm here to ask for funds for early voting.

Our most urgent task in this time of political crisis, both nationally and at the state level, is restoring and strengthening the democratic processes that have been under attack for years. We need to put the power back in the hands of the people so we can achieve all the other reforms that the public needs and wants.

I am deeply grateful to Senator Krueger and her colleagues for passing a robust package of voting reforms on the first day of this year's legislative session. Those were the first voting reforms the state had passed in more than 100 years, and they were a giant step forward in making voting truly accessible to all New Yorkers. We still need your help to do more—you can find our to-do list on the Let New York Vote website—but that was an exhilarating and historic start to the work of bringing New York's electoral system into the 21st century.

But to get ready for one of those reforms, early voting, counties will need some funding—we estimate about \$25 million. And unfortunately, although the governor passed the early voting bill, he did not put any funding for early voting in his budget.

Without money from the state, counties may struggle with what amounts to an unfunded mandate, and resistance may develop to this long-overdue and sorely needed voting reform.

The governor has said that the funding gap will take care of itself because there will be extra money in the budget due to the savings from combining state and federal primaries, another of this year's voting reforms. It is true that the savings from combining the primaries should more than pay for the cost of early voting. But that won't help this year, since there will not be any federal primaries in 2019. Besides, there needs to be money specifically earmarked for this use, to make sure the counties get what they need.

So we ask that you make sure that the State Senate includes a minimum of \$25 million in direct funding for Early Voting, and that you hold strong during budget negotiations so that money is included in the final bill.

March 2, 2019

Good Afternoon Senators,

My name is Matt Minnella; I'm a constituent and I'm here today on behalf of the New York Democratic Lawyers Council to urge that the critical funding needed to implement Early Voting be appropriated in this year's budget.

Simply put, Early Voting will make it easier for New Yorkers to participate in the democratic process. This past November, I helped monitor the polls in Brooklyn and Staten Island and I can attest that voters experienced crowded poll sites, malfunctioning ballot scanners, and overburdened staff. Any one of these problems or the many other issues New Yorkers face on Election Day can be solved - at least in part - by Early Voting.

While the state legislature's passage of Early Voting earlier this year was a victory for voting rights, without the necessary funding appropriated, it will be a hollow one. An upfront capital investment in electronic poll books is needed to track early voting and ensure the integrity of the system. Moreover, localities will need assistance to meet the increased costs of additional personnel and equipment. Finally, and most importantly, funding must be provided to educate voters and train poll workers, in order to avoid mistakes and confusion.

It has been estimated that these essential needs will cost \$25 million, an amount well spent to make participating in democracy easier in this state. Ultimately, this is about improving access, which requires education, training, and clear information to raise public awareness about a new program. If anything, the Legislature should err on the side of more funding at the outset, to launch Early Voting properly, maximize the intended benefit and minimize the risk of unintended consequences.

Without the proper funding, Early Voting won't be able to realize its full potential of improving this state's woeful turnout, or far worse, implementation will be plagued by problems and be used as an example of why states should not implement Early Voting. I implore you to not let that be the case. On behalf of the New York Democratic Lawyers Council, I respectfully request that you appropriate the necessary funding to help expand the democratic process in New York through Early Voting.

Thank you.

My name is Clare Gailey and I live in Brooklyn. Last year I asked my neighbors for 50 signatures and became a member of the Kings County Democratic County Committee. Over the past few weeks I've been knocking on the doors of my fellow committee members, to ask them if they'll help make the quorum we need to organize an Assembly District Committee.

In the process, I discovered that one of our committee members died in 2017. Yet she could be added onto the committee in 2018, because the New York voter rolls are a mess.

We all know the voter rolls are a mess. We all know stories of people who have tried repeatedly to change mistakes with their names or addresses, and can't get it done.

There is a solution. The acronym is ERIC, which stands for Electronic Registration Information Center. (<https://ericstates.org/statistics>)

- ERIC is a nonprofit.
- 23 states and Washington, D.C. work with ERIC to clean their voter rolls.

ERIC does 3 things:

1. Maintains the list of voters for a state. It does this by (quoting their website) "comparing voter registration data between states, to motor vehicle licensing agency data, and to the Social Security Administration master death index list."
2. Identifies potential voters
3. Requires the state, every 2 years, to contact those potential voters about getting registered

To date, ERIC has identified **34 million potential voters**.

By my calculation, a New York contract with ERIC would cost about \$100,000 a year.

It also requires an act of legislation. Attached is the South Carolina version of that legislation that we could use as a template. See Section 2.

If we are serious about respecting New Yorkers' right to vote – if we want electronic pollbooks and automatic voter registration to be effective – we also need to make sure our current data are accurate. Hiring the assistance of ERIC, which has proven so valuable to other states, would be the easiest way to achieve reliable voter rolls, with the added benefit of identifying more voters.