



New York City Campaign Finance Board

40 Rector Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10006

tel. 212.306.7100 fax 212.306.7143

www.nyccfb.info info@nyccfb.info

**Testimony of Art Chang
Chairman, Voter Assistance Advisory Committee
NYC Campaign Finance Board**

**City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
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Good afternoon Chair Brewer and members of the committee. I am Art Chang, chair of the CFB's Voter Assistance Advisory Committee, and I am joined today by Amy Loprest, Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board.

I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of Resolution No. 1343, which will put forward the voice of the New York City Council to support the common-sense use of technology to improve the way we conduct our elections. I am happy to lend our voice in support as well.

New York was one of the very last states to respond to the federal mandate requiring all jurisdictions to adopt electronic voting. Our state and city expended considerable resources to purchase and deploy the electronic ballot scanners New Yorkers use on Election Day. Despite a massive investment in technology to improve the way we cast our votes, we somehow neglected to improve the way we count our votes.

There is no logical reason we should be using scissors, paper, and pencil to compile and transmit a tally of votes that are collected by electronic device. State Election Law should not prohibit us from making the highest and best use of the technology we already possess, to count election results with greater accuracy and efficiency. The law needs to change. We simply don't have the luxury of delay—in November, we will be counting votes with the entire nation watching.

My VAAC colleagues and I spend much of our time together talking about ways to encourage more New Yorkers to participate in the democratic process. Providing timely, accurate results in City elections is a small, but important way to give New Yorkers confidence that the system works.

As we take this one small step, we should be considering others. Technology has enabled a broad and public conversation about every issue and every type of political campaign. But to formally engage the democratic process, we still require citizens to enter a process that lacks the accessibility and responsiveness they are accustomed to in their everyday lives.

We will be holding a hearing tonight to discuss our annual Voter Assistance report, which laid out an agenda to expand the use of technology in the administration of our elections. We hope the City Council will join us to push the state to bring our democratic system into the 21st century.

We should push to amend the law so that New Yorkers can register to vote online. Studies show that states with paperless, online voter registration have expanded their population of registered voters—especially among young adults. It’s essential to engage young people as soon as they reach voting age, and online registration is a great way to do it.

If voters can update their registration information online, the 12 percent of voting-age New Yorkers who move to a new address each year can continue to receive the information they need to stay engaged.

We should demand greater flexibility in the law to allow election officials to design ballots that voters can read and understand more easily.

We should be opening up new channels of information for New Yorkers to receive official, non-partisan information about the political process.

Too often, lawmakers believe legislation can solve all of our problems, but in crafting detailed solutions, new problems can arise. State election law specifies the precise steps in the process to close the polls—so we need new legislation to streamline the vote-counting process. State election law specifies the font size and layout of the ballots—so we need new legislation to design a ballot that is readable.

My message to you as lawmakers is this: if we are to encourage innovation—and I believe we must—the law must provide the flexibility for good ideas to enter the public sphere, and it must provide the space for public servants to implement them.

These are all positions we've endorsed in our annual report. These simple, common-sense steps are long overdue. To engage more New Yorkers constructively in our communal civic life, our administration of elections in New York State and City must evolve. This starts--but should not end--with amending the law to provide a more accurate and timely way to count our votes.

Thank you for your work, and for the opportunity to testify here today.

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