

COMMON CAUSE/NY 2020 PRIORITIES

Common Cause/NY has been a long-time advocate for a fair, ethical and equitable government. That is why in the 2020-2021 legislative session our priorities include:

Continue the expansion of voting rights in New York State

PASS AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION (AVR): There are 1.1 million New Yorkers who are eligible to vote but are not registered. Our outdated voter registration system must be modernized to ensure accurate voter rolls and all eligible New Yorkers have a say in our democracy. AVR does this by transforming voter registration from an opt-in to an opt-out model when New Yorkers interact with government agencies. AVR simplifies voter registration and is a popular pro-voter reform that has been implemented in 16 states across the country.

ALLOW NONPARTISAN POLL WATCHERS INTO POLLING SITES: Common Cause/New York will be championing a nonpartisan poll watching bill which would allow individuals from nonpartisan civic organizations to monitor elections. Currently, only political parties may deputize and assign observers to poll sites. Having nonpartisan poll watchers would strengthen the public's trust in our elections, while providing neutral oversight and assistance.

Invest in our democracy's infrastructure

ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT FUNDING FOR 27 DAYS OF EARLY VOTING IN 2020: 33 states provide some form of state funding to support local or statewide elections. Until last year, New York was one of the few states that did not. Last year's budget allocation of \$24.5 million for early voting implementation and electronic pollbooks for counties was unprecedented. As budgets are inherently political statements, and with the 2020 election cycle fast approaching in an atmosphere of anxiety, New York must signal a firm commitment to strengthening and protecting our democracy.

In 2020, there will be at least three major elections statewide: the presidential primary in April, the state/federal primary election in June, and the general election in November. Counties will have to manage and fund 27 days of early voting next year. It is vital that counties have the resources they need, as all three elections are anticipated to have record-breaking turnout at a time when our democracy is under stress and our election system under attack. Early voting, when properly implemented and well-publicized, helps ease the pressure on poll sites on election day. The state must do its part by providing additional funds, so New Yorkers can continue to reap the full benefits of early voting.



ENDORSE A FAIR REDISTRICTING PROCESS: The revised redistricting process adopted in 2014 has unusual aspects which raise questions as to whether it will achieve its goal of implementing a fair and equitable redistricting process in New York for the upcoming redistricting cycle. We urge the Governor and the leaders of both legislative houses to reaffirm their commitment to end gerrymandering and commit to support and advance fair redistricting that is transparent, non-discriminatory, and politically impartial.

ENSURE OUR ELECTIONS ARE RUN ONLY USING VOTER-MARKED PAPER BALLOTS: Voters must have the highest confidence that the machines they use in casting their votes are safe, secure and will count every vote accurately. Yet, vendors who make those machines have every incentive to cut corners. In fact, our state has been asked to certify machines that use the outmoded Windows 7 operating system, and which failed to accurately record tens of thousands of votes in an election this past November. Their request has highlighted major flaws in the process the state uses to certify new voting machines. We urge the Legislature to reform the certification process and ensure that we use only the most reliable technology – voter marked paper ballots – for our elections.

REIMAGINE INDEPENDENT ETHICS OVERSIGHT: The Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) was created as a result of scandals and public dissatisfaction with its predecessor ethics commission. Recent events make it clear that it is time, once again, to seriously recast ethics oversight in our state. We urge the Legislature to conduct public hearings into ethics oversight. We further recommend that the Governor and Legislature engage in an open process of exploring more effective models of ethics oversight which can be adopted in New York State and develop a plan for truly independent ethics oversight.

Enforce the recommendations of the 2018 New York State Compensation Commission and uphold the ban on outside income for state legislators

Last year, the New York State Legislature saw a substantive and warranted pay increase, the first in over 20 years. State legislators saw their salaries rise by nearly 40% when wages rose from \$80,000 to \$110,000 annually. Due to ongoing litigation, it remains unclear if further salary increases will be implemented down the road. However, it is vital that the legislature uphold the other half of the Commission's recommendations and state legislators must give up their outside income.

