

IN-PERSON SIGNATURE GATHERING MUST BE SUSPENDED FOR THE DURATION OF THE PANDEMIC

February 5, 2021

While the New York State Legislature and the Governor have taken a first step to address in-person petitioning, more is urgently needed as **in-person petitioning is a potential superspreader event**. That is why Common Cause New York is calling on the Governor to **immediately suspend in-person petitioning as it endangers the welfare of all New Yorkers and defies the recommendations of the CDC and the Governor's own public health orders.**

We urge the Governor to move quickly as the statewide petitioning process begins for candidates on March 2 in advance of the June primary as:

- All decision making must start from a public health framework and therefore in-person petitioning violates CDC and New York State's own core public health strategy of social distancing and only interacting with a small group of household contacts.¹
- Attempting to maintain in-person petitioning despite geographic-specific reductions is misguided, at best. Petition-circulators will still have to interact with persons outside their households, violating public health social distancing best practice guidance.
- In New York City alone, there are 458 candidates who will need to start collecting in-person signatures in a matter of weeks. It is unconscionable to ask them to risk their lives and the lives of others by maintaining the in-person requirement.

Therefore, effective immediately, in-person petitioning must be suspended for the duration of the pandemic in order to follow public health guidelines and keep all New Yorkers safe. We acknowledge that COVID and a short time frame are working against any rapid changes to a longstanding piece of the political process, however it is imperative **public health mandates and ease of implementation must drive decision making for petitioning in 2021.**

After a quick and limited exploration of moving petitioning online for the June primary, Common Cause New York determined that the development and deployment of a safe and secure online petitioning portal would be largely impractical in less than 30 days. We also looked at solutions used by other

¹ [New York State Department of Health](#)

states² and were unable to find one that would meet New York's needs with less than a month to execute. And, finally, while there are certainly private sector solutions for this issue,³ unless there is a single fiscal sponsor, like a government agency or political party, the costs would be prohibitive for many candidates despite the lowered signature threshold.

Therefore, due to the rapidly approaching petitioning start date, Common Cause New York urges the Governor and the Mayor of New York City to:

- **Suspend petitioning for the duration of 2021.**

The state must immediately suspend in-person petitioning requirements for the duration of 2021 and instead utilize the filing of the appropriate petitioning cover sheet with the appropriate local Board. In addition, campaigns must submit a Filer Registration with the relevant local Board or, if in New York City, file a Candidate Certification with the New York City Campaign Finance Board by the first day of the petitioning period.

- **Explore electronic submission of petitioning signatures for the duration of the pandemic.** The New York State Board of Elections, in consultation with local boards of elections, should develop protocols and a process for collecting and submitting petition signatures online for 2022 and beyond.

² New Jersey and Rhode Island.

³ Massachusetts, pursuant to consent order, accepted petition signatures for an initiative in 2020 obtained through DocuSign.

