

New State Election Law Reforms

The 2019 NYS legislative session saw the enactment of series of laws to reform voting procedures in the state and increase voter participation. These include early voting, voter pre-registration, voter registration transfers and joint primaries.

Additionally, the State Legislature passed and the governor signed two resolutions for constitutional amendments providing for no-excuse absentee voting and same-day registration. These measures must be passed by the next legislature and approved in a statewide referendum.

In addition to these reforms, a public financing of campaigns commission charged with developing and implementing a system that would match public funds with individual campaign contributions was adopted in the state budget on April 1, 2019. The panel's final recommendations are expected by December 1, 2019.

Below is a brief description of the key measures.

1. Early Voting

- a. Summary: This measure establishes a nine-day early voting period in each county throughout the state. At least one and up to seven polling location(s) would be made available for each 50,000 registered voters in each respective county. Polling locations must be open to accommodate early voting beginning two full weekends prior to any special, primary, or general elections and staffed equally on a bipartisan basis. Early voting would run until the Sunday before Election Day, concluding two days prior to any election. Polls would be open for at least 8 hours between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. each week day during the early voting period.
- b. Effective Date: The law takes effect for the 2019 general election.

2. Pre-Registration of 16 & 17 Year Olds

- a. Summary: This measure amends the election law to allow teens 16 years or older to pre-register to vote so they are already in the system when they turn 18. Upon reaching the age of eighteen, the local Board of Elections will automatically register the youth. Local boards are required to adopt policies to promote student voter registration and pre-registration.
- b. Effective Date: This bill takes effect on January 1, 2020.

3. Voter Registration Transfers

- a. Summary: The board of elections must transfer a registration and enrollment of a voter to wherever they relocate within the state upon receipt of a notice of a change of address or when any voter submits an affidavit ballot with a new address.
- b. Effective Date: Sixtieth day after enactment (signed into law January 24, 2019)

4. Consolidation of Federal and State Primaries

- a. Summary: This bill consolidates the federal and state primaries into the fourth Tuesday of June. This bill amends every provision in the election law that fixes specific dates

pertaining to running for office in order to conform those provisions to a deadline and due date scheme that accommodates a primary election in June rather than September.

i. Specifically, the bill makes many conforming changes to the electoral calendar.

Some of the most notable changes are:

1. Polling places must be designated by March 15th each year, a month and a half earlier than the current May 1st deadline;
2. Certified texts of ballot proposals must be submitted three months prior to the general election at which such proposal is to be voted upon. The existing deadline is 36 days in advance;
3. Local Boards of Elections must publish updated enrollment lists before February 1 each year rather than April 1;
4. Petition deadlines are moved three weeks earlier relative to the primary date;
5. A vacancy occurring three months before the general election (except in the offices of Governor, Lt. Governor, or U.S. Senator) shall be filled at the general election held next thereafter, unless otherwise provided by the constitution or previously filled at a special election. (The existing language sets this cutoff date at September 20, substantially less than three months before the general election).

b. Effective Date: Effective immediately for the 2018 local elections.

Background Resources:

[Link to Full Summary and Analysis of Bills](#)

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-signs-landmark-legislation-modernizing-new-yorks-voting-laws>

<https://nyassembly.gov/Press/files/20190114.php>

<https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/protecting-new-yorks-democracy-senate-passes-historic-election-reforms>

<https://letnyvote.org/>