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Testimony of Dawn Sandow, Deputy Executive Director Board of Elections in the City of New York

**Joint Committee of Finance and
Governmental Operations
Council of the City of New York**

Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget

May 21, 2021

Chair Cabrera, Chair Dromm, members of the New York City Council's Committee on Governmental Operations and Committee of Finance, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the Board of Elections (Board). I am Dawn Sandow, the Deputy Executive Director of the Board. Joining me today is our Finance Director, Gerald Sullivan.

Fiscal Year 2021 Review

Before discussing the Mayor's Executive Budget for FY22, let me thank the City Council and the Mayor for providing the necessary support to the Board in FY21. That funding met the Board's constitutional and statutory mandates as well as the needs of the voters of the City of New York. I extend a special thank you for addressing the Board's funding needs.

In FY21, the Board was budgeted to conduct two citywide election events including the November 2020 Presidential General Election and Primary Election scheduled for June 22, 2021. In addition, the Board conducted 5 unfunded Special Elections, 4 of which were Ranked Choice Voting.

Mayor's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2022

The Board would like to express its gratitude to Mayor de Blasio, his Administration and the New York City Council for partnering with the Board. The funding provided in the Mayor's FY21 Executive budget is \$181.1 million, of which \$97.5 million was allocated for Personal Services (PS) and \$83.6 million allocated for Other Than Personal Services (OTPS). This is a substantial increase from past budgets. In FY22 the Board will conduct two citywide elections, the November General Election and a Primary in June 2022 for Federal, State and Local offices. Each election will be preceded by 9 days of Early Voting. The Board has taken measures to identify and survey suitable locations for Early Voting poll sites. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the expansion of the number of Early Voting sites and the Board's tireless work to make voting convenient to the voters of the City of New York. In 2019, the first year of early voting the Board had 38 early voting sites city-wide. I am proud to report that for the June 2021 Primary, the Board will have 104 sites for early voting! In addition to more Early voting sites, the Commissioners of the Board recently announced an additional 10 hours of early voting, making it possible for voters to vote at a time that works for them!

The Board acknowledges that its fiscal needs are fully met through the end of fiscal year 2021 to fulfill the June citywide elections. It is important to note that the Board is painstakingly aware that this election will be far from routine. The June Primary will be the first time the Board will be using ranked choice voting in a city-wide election. In

preparation for the monumental changes that are underway, the Board and the Administration have been conducting regular meetings to prepare for the city-wide Ranked Choice Voting roll out. Although the Board is not tasked with the public education campaign we have been committed to educating voters by using print, digital, social media, and out of home advertisements. In addition, to the aforementioned outlets, we also sent all voters a direct mailing booklet. PSA production and educational RCV palm cards, signage will be strategically placed at all poll sites and privacy sleeves with RCV instructions will be given to all voters. The Board hopes to be able to continue this level of public education that the voters in the City of New York have been accustomed to receiving from the NYC Board of Elections.

There are some outstanding needs that the Board does have as we enter into fiscal year 2022.

The introduction of Early Voting creates new cyber security needs for the Board. In order to ensure protection from external threats, the Board intends to use a portion of the Early Voting budget to form an internal cyber security taskforce, enhancing current assets provided by DoITT with additional Board staff. The additional staff will work in conjunction with the Board's MIS, Tablet Unit and Electronic Voting Systems Departments to increase the fortification and monitoring of network firewalls and other security modalities. This will ensure rigorous protection of all Board systems.

Due to changes in Election Law, specifically early voting and an increase in absentee ballots, the Board has had a significant increase in permanent and seasonal head count. Workstations which had to comply with COVID regulations have been added in all Borough Offices to accommodate additional employees who handle the processing of absentee applications, ballots volume, cure letters and early voting staff. Mail sorting machines in each office required for the volume of absentee processing have taken up a substantial square footage. The spaces were previously used for departmental file storage, employee lunch/break areas, meeting/training space as well as space for post-election activities (canvass). The Board's current arrangements do not allow for social distancing.

Absentee ballots must be stored on site in a secured, double-locked room during the entire election process. During the FY 2021 Election Cycle, Borough Offices repurposed nearly every room with a door and a double lock for absentee storage which decreased employee work space significantly.

Queens Borough Office post-election canvass activities were temporarily located off site in FY 2021 to accommodate the need for social distancing, and due to the lack of space in the Borough Office. Other Borough Offices needed to move their election equipment

to other storage facilities to create room for sorting and counting tables for absentee ballot processing as well as conducting their canvass.

The Board is proposing 16,000 to 22,000 of square feet be added to the current Borough Offices. In addition, the Board is requesting an additional 18,000 square footage in the Executive Office at 32 Broadway. We have been working with OMB and DCAS to secure extra space to ensure a safe and clean environment for our employees.

Conclusion

The Board is committed to working closely with its government partners and interested parties to effectively serve the voters of the City of New York. Any resources allocated to the Board will be used responsibly to meet the needs of the voting public.

The Board will maintain an open communication as the Early Voting process evolves, as we learn lessons from our 1st Citywide implementation of Ranked Choice Voting and for any additional election events that may be required.

As always, my colleague and I are available to answer any questions that you may have and to provide you with additional information.