



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0848-2015, **Version:** *

Res. No. 848

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature and the People of the State of New York to amend the State Constitution, and the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation amending the Election Law to establish same-day and online voter registration.

By Council Members Kallos, Cabrera, Barron, Chin, Gentile, Gibson, Lander, Menchaca, Levin and Vallone

Whereas, According to analysis conducted by the United States Elections Project (USEP), only 36.4% of eligible voters nationally cast ballots in the 2014 midterm elections, setting the lowest number since 1942, when the country was engaged in World War II; and

Whereas, In the same elections, only 29% of eligible voters voted in New York State, making it 49th in the nation in terms of voter participation, according to USEP data; and

Whereas, New York City's voter turnout rate for the 2014 midterm elections was even more alarming, with only about 20% of eligible voters casting ballots, hitting a historic low, according to the New York City Campaign Finance Board; and

Whereas, Most of the states with the highest voter turnout rates have implemented various electoral reforms to increase voter participation, including same-day registration; and

Whereas, Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have enacted reform to offer same-day registration, according to the public policy group Demos; and

Whereas, Using 2012 presidential election data, Demos found that four of the top five states for voter turnout had implemented same-day registration; and

Whereas, Furthermore, Demos' analysis of presidential elections' turnout rates from 1980 to 2012 revealed that the average turnout rate in states with same-day registration was 10.3% higher than the average in

states without the reform; and

Whereas, Some states have more than 15% of their voters using same-day registration, including Minnesota at 17.89% and Idaho at 17.69%, according to Demos; and

Whereas, Currently in New York State, registration forms must be postmarked at least 25 days before an upcoming election, causing many potential voters to miss their chance because they fail to meet the deadline; and

Whereas, Another voter-friendly reform supported by many voter participation advocates is online registration; and

Whereas, The Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA), in its 2014 report to President Obama, listed as its top recommendation the implementation of online registration as an option for all voters; and

Whereas, An online registration system typically requires the potential voter to have some form of state-issued identification card, such as a driver's license, because a signature is needed to complete an application, and a signature on file at a state's motor vehicles agency can be transferred electronically to election officials; and

Whereas, As of July of 2015, 21 states, including New York, offer online registration to applicants with an existing signature in the motor vehicles agency's database, and an additional six states have passed legislation to offer it, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures; and

Whereas, Several of these 21 states have gone further and offer online registration to applicants without a state-issued identification card, including Minnesota, Delaware, and Missouri, according to the Brennan Center for Justice; and

Whereas, PCEA's 2014 report found that Arizona, which was the first in the nation to introduce this practice in 2002, saw an increase in registration rates from 29% to 53% among young voters after the state created an online system; and

Whereas, PCEA's 2014 report also showed that in Arizona in 2008, 94% of online registrants voted, compared to 85% of registrants by paper; and

Whereas, In addition to increasing registration rate and turnout rate, PCEA also credits online registration systems with increasing the accuracy of voter rolls, which in turn reduces delays and congestion at poll sites; and

Whereas, Furthermore, PCEA states that jurisdictions reap significant cost savings from using online registration, citing a county in Arizona that has saved 80 cents in labor cost for each online registration; and

Whereas, Since same-day and online registration have both proven to be successful in increasing voter participation, New York State should enact same-day registration and expand online registration to include applicants without a state-issued identification card; and

Whereas, To maximize potential voters' use of these two effective tools, every poll site in New York State on election day should have electronic devices with access to online registration so that potential voters can register and then immediately vote at the site; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature and the People of the State of New York to amend the State Constitution, and the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation amending the Election Law to establish same-day and online voter registration.

LS # 1203.1

7/30/2015

LW