



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1498-2020, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1498

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, S.8902/A.10942, which would authorize boards of elections in New York State to establish absentee ballot drop-off locations.

By Council Members Powers and Kallos

Whereas, The right to vote is the cornerstone of representative democracy; and

Whereas, The public health risks of the COVID-19 virus have made absentee voting a safer alternative to in-person voting for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers; and

Whereas, In the spring of 2020, Governor Cuomo issued executive orders allowing New Yorkers to cite risk of exposure to COVID-19 as a valid reason for requesting an absentee ballot, ordering local boards of election to mail an absentee ballot application form to every eligible voter in the state, and ordering local boards of election to send voters their absentee ballots for the June Primary Election with a postage-paid return envelope; and

Whereas, At a New York City Council oversight hearing on September 25, the City Board of Elections reported that it mailed out over 775,000 absentee ballots to voters in June, a roughly twelve-fold increase from the 2016 Presidential Primary; and

Whereas, In June, due to a United States Postal Service (USPS) error, thousands of mailed-in absentee ballots were initially invalidated by the New York City Board of Elections due to a lack of postmark, only to be subsequently validated in compliance with a federal court order; and

Whereas, Throughout the summer of 2020, newly appointed postmaster general Louis DeJoy implemented policy changes, purportedly to reduce costs and inefficiencies at the USPS, including removing hundreds of high-speed mail sorting machines, cutting overtime, and organizational restructuring; and

Whereas, In July, the USPS sent a letter to all 50 states, warning them that if they did not require voters to request mail-in ballots at least 15 days before an election, there could be a risk that the USPS would not be able to deliver ballots in time for votes to be counted; and

Whereas, On September 21, a federal judge in New York ordered Mr. De Joy and the USPS to reverse the policy changes implemented in the summer, to pre-approve all overtime requested from October 26 to November 6, to treat all election mail as first-class priority mail, and to submit a weekly report detailing the USPS's progress in improving mail delivery; and

Whereas, Due to these operational failures and attempted policy changes at the USPS, public trust in the USPS's ability to deliver absentee ballots on time has eroded; and

Whereas, At the September 25 City Council oversight hearing, the New York City Board of Elections' Executive Director stated that he expects the Board to process more than one million absentee ballots in the November General Election, more than double the amount cast in the June Primary Election; and

Whereas, Returning an absentee ballot to a secure drop box is an increasingly popular alternative to mailing the ballot back through the USPS; and

Whereas, According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the branch of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security tasked with securing election infrastructure, ballot drop boxes are "secure and convenient means for voters to return their mail ballot;" and

Whereas, At least 33 other states and the District of Columbia have used, or plan on using, ballot drop boxes in 2020; and

Whereas, In western states that conduct elections largely via absentee ballots, ballot drop box use is very high, including in Colorado where nearly 75 percent of all ballots were returned to a drop box in 2016; and

Whereas, On September 9, Governor Cuomo signed an Executive Order mandating that boards of election allow voters to drop off absentee ballots at drop boxes located at boards of election offices, early voting poll sites, or Election Day poll sites; and

Whereas, The New York City Board of Elections announced it would provide ballot drop boxes at every board office, early voting poll site, and Election Day poll site; and

Whereas, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried introduced S.8902/A.10942, which would authorize boards of election to set up secure ballot drop box locations across the state, not limited to only poll sites or board offices; and

Whereas, Numerous good government and voting advocacy groups support S.8902/A.10942, including but not limited to the League of Women Voters of New York State, VoteEarlyNY, Citizens Union, and NYPIRG; and

Whereas, Establishing secure ballot drop boxes at various locations would give New York voters more options to return their absentee ballots safely and securely, would eliminate the need for paid postage, and would reduce the burden on the USPS; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, S.8902/A.10942, which would authorize boards of elections in New York State to establish absentee ballot drop-off locations.

LS# 16133
10/7/20
EOF