

**COUNTY OF JEFFERSON**  
**BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

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To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator Robert Hagemann

From: Commissioners Hall and Seymour

Date: Jan. 24, 2019

Re: 2018 Annual Report to the County Legislature in compliance with NYS Election Law §3-212(4)

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Democratic Senate candidates, who campaigned on modernizing New York's election laws, won election last November and ushered in one-party control in Albany.

They made good on their promises in early January, passing bills through both the Senate and the Assembly that combined our biennial federal primary with the state and local one; established early voting; allowed for pre-registration of 16-year-olds; and allowed registrations to follow voters moving among New York's 62 counties. Two other bills passed that will eventually require amendments to the state constitution (and can be completed no earlier than 2022): Same day voting and "no fault absentee" or, in the governor's parlance, "vote by mail."

The governor signed the first four bills today, so they are law. He is also proposing additional changes that would fundamentally alter the way county Boards of Elections operate:

- Online voter registration
- Agency-based automatic voter registration (extending the DMV-style registration to all SUNY & CUNY schools, Departments of Health, Labor, Social Services and State, as well as Veterans' Affairs, Mental Health and Office for the Aging, to name a few)
- Making Election Day a state holiday
- Extending hours for Primary Day by six hours

- Electronic poll books

We will not know if the Legislature agrees with any – or all – of these proposals until April, when the budget passes.

However, the time to prepare is now.

At minimum, we need to have conversations about where to conduct nine days of early voting and the budgetary impact of being open at least 60 extra hours during the general election.

Now let's look backward.

The 2018 election included three elections:

- The Democratic primary for the 21<sup>st</sup> Congressional Seat, held in June. The race featured six candidates, but yielded just 12.5 percent turnout among that party. (There was also a Women's Equality Party primary on the same day, which attracted one voter out of 18.)
- Primaries for state and two local offices, held in September. The Democratic primary for governor attracted 16 percent turnout among that party, while Republican primaries for Alexandria and Pamelia town councils enticed about 20 percent of voters to the polls that day.
- The general election, which included federal (U.S. Senate, 21<sup>st</sup> Congressional District) and state offices (governor, comptroller, state attorney general, Supreme Court, Senate, three Assembly seats), a countywide office (sheriff) and about three dozen local seats. The turnout was relatively good, eclipsing the last gubernatorial year (2014) by almost 10 percent.

Elections ran smoothly, although there were occasional headaches.

The low primary turnouts allowed us to predict properly the number of ballots needed. We correctly anticipated the higher-than-normal turnout for the general election, so only one election district ultimately exceeded the number of ballots we had initially printed for them.

Meanwhile, political parties continued finding endless loopholes in Election Law to make last minute substitutions of candidates. There were also multiple lawsuits initiated after the judicial nominating conventions, with decisions, stays and reversals that did not resolve completely until 18 days before Election Day. While we awaited the ultimate decision, we received dozens of calls from absentee voters asking, "Where's my ballot?"

We believe that the decision to move the primary from September to June will allow cases to proceed in courts while not impeding our ability to meet transmittal deadlines for military and overseas voters, as well as offering the correct ballot to "snowbirds" and those who opt to vacation at an unfixed address around Election Day.

Our office served the voters of Jefferson County year-round, administered three elections successfully and did so while coming in under budget for the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Our budget

request for 2019 was almost identical to the amount we received in 2015, which is a point of pride. We try to “hold the line” as much as possible, although these unexpected state mandates may test our resolve this year!

Our voting machines are now 11 years old, but are holding up remarkably well thanks to two diligent technicians downstairs. We still have not heard of the state or federal governments offering funds to replace the machines, although the vendors who sell machines are getting more creative in their pitches!

Finally, we continue to share services with school districts in our county. We helped the Alexandria, Carthage, General Brown, Indian River, Thousand Islands and Watertown school districts by programming our machines and deploying them for their May budget votes. (We also helped the Jefferson-Lewis BOCES with their capital vote in March.) This saved them the cost of purchasing \$11,000 machines and hiring technicians to create their ballots and test their machines. We bill the schools for any costs we incur, so it has no fiscal impact on the county taxpayer. The schools end up paying a mere fraction of what they would have had they opted to purchase machines.