

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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To: Jefferson County legislators and County Administrator **Robert Hagemann**

From: Commissioners LaFave and Seymour

Date: Jan. 31, 2023

Re: 2022 Annual Report as required by Election Law §3-212(4)(a)

The new normal in administering elections in New York state is that nothing is ever the same.

Early voting, electronic poll books and June primaries arrived in 2019. The following year, we figured out how to hold elections during a pandemic. In 2021, it was a condensed petition period.

This past year, it was a redistricting fight that necessitated an unexpected August primary.

The state Legislature passed 33 new election bills in 2022, which the governor subsequently signed into law. These included:

- Extending the COVID excuse for requesting an absentee ballot
- Creating an “early canvass” of absentee ballots before election day
- Establishing poll sites on or near college campuses if enough registered voters reside there.
- Providing postage paid return envelopes for absentee applications and ballots

- Passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act, which protects voters in protected classes from having their rights denied or abridged
- Expanding the state Supreme Court
- Requiring Board of Election to publish election district maps in shapefile format on their website

One-third of the bills signed into law this year were done in the first two months and related to our once-per-decade redistricting efforts. Many of us weren't here during the last Census-catalyzed reshaping of boundaries, but many late nights were utilized to get new lines ingested into our voter registration system in time for petitions.

Before redistricting court chaos necessitated an August primary, our intention was to use the June primary as a "soft launch" of our early voting poll site expansion. The law requires two sites only for the general election, but we had never tried to run simultaneous elections in two different locations for nine consecutive days.

We partnered with Adams municipal government for our June launch, but found ourselves in a predicament for August. Were we going to offer two-site early voting for two out of three elections? Or all three? We chose three, only to see 13 percent of eligible voters participate in the ten days of in-person voting (including Election Day).

It's a lesson we'll carry forward into 2023, in which hundreds of local offices – including county treasurer and district attorney – are up for election. The often-promised online voter registration is supposed to go live in April, which will make it even easier for New Yorkers to register to vote. (Automatic voter registration, passed in 2020, has still not been implemented.) The question remains: Will we see these new voters at the polls?

As we've noted in past annual reports, our Dominion Imagecast Precinct machines purchased in 2008 are very much acting their age. Because of that, we noticed an uptick in ambiguous ballots during the November general election. Replacement parts are becoming harder to source.

The state has now certified three companies – Dominion, ES&S and Hart Intercivic – to provide tabulators and ballot marking devices to counties. It's time to start an earnest discussion about what it might cost to replace our fleet. It's imperative that we maintain voter confidence in the accurate tabulation of results, and machine breakdowns – however temporary or fixable – can undermine that effort.