



45 Broadway | 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor | New York, NY 10006  
(212) 967-0322 | [www.unhny.org](http://www.unhny.org)

## **UNH State Fiscal Year 2019-20 Budget & Policy Priorities** **Elections Agenda**

**Election Reform** – Voters and civically active constituents are energized, and we must ensure their interest is met with an electoral system that is accessible, responsive, and equitable. The passage of historic voting laws in the first week of the 2019 legislative season was a strong and intentional message from the New York State government that strengthening democracy is a key priority. To ensure this priority is fully funded and implemented, a number of additional election laws require comprehensive reform.

**Challenge and Opportunity** – The following proposals will protect and expand the right to vote while offering modernized, secure, and fair elections for New Yorkers:

- **Allocate \$7m to Implement Early Voting** – New York passed Early Voting Legislation on January 24th, which will go into effect immediately. Unfortunately, the Governor’s Executive Budget excluded funding to support implementation and recommends reappropriating the savings that will come from recent legislation that will consolidate Federal and State primary elections. However, savings to counties won’t go into effect until 2020, while Early Voting will begin this year. In order properly execute Early Voting, counties need a dedicated funding stream to offset the new administrative costs that will surface in 2019.
- **Fund Electronic Poll Books** – Electronic Pollbooks are necessary to facilitate a successful Early Voting program. Using updated technology at the polls would transform the voting process to be faster, easier, and more efficient. Additionally, Electronic Pollbooks would significantly reduce cost and allow polling sites to have access to voter files in different election districts, therefore reducing data errors that historically turn away voters who don’t appear on the voter rolls due to home address changes.
- **Pass Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)** – This would increase New York voter rolls by 2 million new voters by automatically registering eligible voters when they interact with designated state agencies unless they opt out. To ensure that AVR works for everyone, the State would need to recognize agencies beyond the DMV for the purposes of voter registration. Additionally, voters should have the option to opt-out at the point of service in which they seamlessly register (commonly referred to as “front-end opt-out”).
- **Restore Voting Rights to People on Parole** – Restoring voting rights for people on parole should be codified in law, so restoration is automatic and does not require additional steps other than to re-register. A permanent restoration is necessary to allow nearly 35,000 citizens to cast their vote in all New York elections.
- **Improve Party Affiliation Deadlines** – Flexibility to change party affiliation close to Election Day would permit unaffiliated voters to enroll in a party by the deadline for new registrants while requiring a somewhat longer deadline for changing party enrollment. This would allow registered voters more time to make an informed decision during Primary elections and still maintain the integrity of primaries. New York’s party enrollment registration deadline is by far the most restrictive in the country.

*(over)*

- **The Voter Friendly Ballot Act** – written in consultation with specialists in the fields of graphic design, user experience, and disability accommodation – would create a ballot layout that is easy for voters to read and use. Readable, well-designed ballots are necessary to the overall improvement of Election Day experiences among New York voters.

UNH Recommendation: Adopt and fully fund legislation that facilitates the ability of all New Yorkers to vote by passing common sense reforms for fair and secure voting in New York State: (1) Early Voting; (2) Electronic Pollbooks; (3) Automatic Voter Registration; (4) Parolee Voting; (5) Party Affiliation Flexibility; and (6) Voter Friendly Ballot Act.

*For more information, please contact Lena Coben at (917) 484-9334 or [lcoben@unbny.org](mailto:lcoben@unbny.org)*