



Written Testimony of
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Regarding the Implementation of Early Voting

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Good Morning,

I would like to thank Chair Myrie and all the members of the Elections Committee for offering us the opportunity to testify today. I'm Robert Lopez-Irizarry, President of Generation Vote at NYU. We are an organization whose mission is to educate, mobilize, and connect young people so they can be agents of change in local politics. GenVote@NYU specifically, participated in an early voting rally taking place at Washington Square Park and tabled at our student center to educate students about early voting, for the first time, on our campus. As a student-driven organization dedicated to making youth voting rights a major priority on our campus, we appreciate this opportunity to discuss the importance of early voting to young people in New York.

1. Youth Voter Turnout Is On the Rise Nationwide But New York Lags Behind

18 to 29-year-olds make up 21% of the eligible voting population nationwide.¹ In 2018, 31% of America's eligible 18 to 29-year-olds made their voices heard through the democratic process. This was a ten-point increase from 2014. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University, youth voter turnout increased in every state for which they have data. While New York did show an increase, the voter turnout rate in New York was 16.4% the second-lowest in the country behind only Arkansas. For context, our neighbors in New Jersey and Massachusetts both had around a 33% youth turnout rate.²

2. Early Voting Presents Unprecedented Opportunities for Youth Voter Enfranchisement

¹ John Della Volpe. *Historic Turnout and Performance by Young Voters*. Harvard Kennedy School of Government Institute of Politics. November 7th, 2018.

² Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. *Final Analysis of State by State Youth Voter Turnout Shows Increases Across the Country*. Tufts University. May 20th, 2019.



We have seen, on the ground, that students and young people love the idea of early voting. Through our outreach to students in our “Get Out The Early Vote” campaign at NYU, we found that students were excited to cast their ballots before Election Day and vote at a time that was convenient for them between classes, extracurriculars, and jobs. I had friends, who voted early, tell me specifically how short the lines were and how efficient the whole process was. I even know folks that went in full costume to the polls on Halloween. Early voting has the opportunity to enfranchise scores of young people and bring a new dimension of excitement to the polls. **In fact, this was illustrated in the 2018 midterms where between the ages of 18 to 29 early voting turnout increased by 188% when compared to 2014.**³ This increase represented the largest overall gains in early voters of any age group across the country.

2020 will be a high turnout year and young voters are energized. The question then becomes will New York improve on its youth voter turnout rate? We believe that if done properly, with real consideration given to youth turnout, early voting presents a major opportunity to increase the participation of young voters in the political process.

3. **The Lack of On-Campus Early Voting Poll Sites Can Create Institutional Barriers to Voting**

A study done by CIRCLE found that **52% of the young voters surveyed needed to rearrange their work or school schedule in order to vote.** In this same survey, it was found that **25% needed a ride to the polls.**⁴ If we hope to empower the next generation of voters, the legislature must make early voting accessible for college students by expanding the number of on-campus early voting sites.

Across the state, we only found 10 early voting sites that were actually on college campuses. We have heard from students in SUNY: Oneonta, for example, who have to drive almost 30 minutes to their nearest early voting poll site. There is even an astounding video story posted on Facebook by students of SUNY: Stony Brook in which they detail their journey to an early voting poll site.⁵ Their journey documents a three-hour commute using primarily buses, shuttles, and a lot of walking. This lack of access has created, whether intended or not, an institutional barrier for a large portion of students across New York state.

³ Julie Beck and Caroline Kitchener. “Early Signs of a Youth Wave”. *The Atlantic*. November 6, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/11/youth-turnout-midterm-2018/575092/>

⁴ Reynol Junco, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Lashon Amado, Victoria Fahlberg, Laurel Bliss. *Expanding the Electorate: How Simple changes in Election Administration Can Improve Voter Participation Among Low Income Youth*. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University and Opportunity Youth United. October 2018.

⁵ Center for Civic Justice at Stony Brook University. “Our Early Voting Journey - October 26, 2019”. October 29, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/civicjusticesbu/videos/410271793251201/>



It is important to consider how state laws and policies can create barriers to voting for young people. There is a major difference between an early voting poll site on-campus and one that requires a nearly 30-minute drive. The reality is that young people are the population least likely to own a car and least likely to even have a driver's license.⁶ In addition, on many campuses across the state, the university administration will often not allow students in their first-year to have a car on campus.⁷ If a student does not have a car of their own it can be very difficult to access an early voting poll site that would normally be a short drive by car. Not having a polling place on-campus can disenfranchise hundreds if not thousands of young eligible voters.

The lack of accessible poll sites, intensifies the major problems of youth turnout as observed in the abysmal turnout rate in New York. Early voting is meant to alleviate many of the barriers that New Yorkers previously faced. It allots nine days to go vote rather than only election day. However, 70% of students work and go to school, of which 43% are low-income students in the United States.⁸ Voting on election day is already a logistical issue, for many students, due to this reality. If us students now have to find a way to commute to an early voting poll site nearly 30 minutes away, the prospect of voting becomes very difficult.

4. Young New Yorkers Need Accessible Early Voting Poll Sites

Overall, early voting is an important first step in the right direction for New Yorkers; especially for students and young people. That does not mean that our work is done, we must rather work to improve this great initiative. The answer, to the question of how to improve from a 16.4% youth voter turnout rate, is to make voting easy and accessible for young people. We must thoughtfully consider the expansion of early voting poll sites across college campuses in New York. We must empower young people and not place undue barriers that make it difficult to vote.

⁶ Michael Sivak and Brandon Schoettle (2012) Update: Percentage of Young Persons With a Driver's License Continues to Drop, *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 13:4, 341, DOI: [10.1080/15389588.2012.696755](https://doi.org/10.1080/15389588.2012.696755)

⁷ Martha C. White. "Vexing Vehicular Question for Freshmen: To Drive or Not to Drive?" *NBC News*, August 20, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/freshman-year/vexing-vehicular-question-freshmen-drive-or-not-drive-n413086>

⁸ "Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce." *Georgetown University*. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/learnandearn/#full-report>