

# COMMUNIQUE

By Marci Rosenblum

Local 1180 Communications Director

## EARLY VOTING NUMBERS LOW BUT SPIRITS HIGH

**In a city known for Election Day mishaps, extremely long lines, and heated tempers, the first attempt at early voting seems to have gone off without a hitch — at least according to the New York City Board of Elections and Local 1180 members who reported in about their early voting experiences.**

For the first time in state history, New York City registered voters were able to vote beginning October 26 for nine days through November 3. This year, Election Day was Tuesday, November 5.

"New York was seriously lagging in its ability to make it easier for residents to vote," said Local 1180 Second Vice President Gerald Brown. "We were the 39th state to implement early voting and for such a progressive state, that isn't saying very much. We should have been one of the leaders in the early voting movement., not one of the last to allow it. Labor unions are hopeful that early voting will help reverse the downward trend in voter turnout in the years to come."

Local 1180 did a large outreach campaign via social media, direct member-to-member contact, website posts, and email blasts to members to inform them about early voting, the benefits, how it worked, and encourage them to take advantage of the process.

Retired Local 1180 member Ed Adomaitis from Queens said he voted early and was glad he did. "It was convenient to vote in the nine days that early voting was offered. It was easy. There were no long lines. I would be glad to do it again and suggest everyone take advantage of it," he said. "The only disadvantage is that you cannot vote at any site; you must go to your designated location."

Designated locations for early voting might only be for 2019, however. According to a Board of Elections spokesperson, they decided to assign early voters to a designated location in order to minimize ballot variations that each center would have to produce on demand, and simplify a hand recount, if one became necessary. In future elections, the BOE claims it is striving to allow early voters to cast a ballot at any polling site in their county. Statewide, there were 248 early polling sites, with 61 of those located in the five New York City boroughs. Reports showed slightly more than 60,000 City residents in total cast early votes of the 256,000 total statewide. That equates to roughly 1.14 percent of

registered City voters who turned out early to the polls. According to the New York City Board of Elections, Manhattan pulled in the highest early voter participation, followed by Brooklyn.

Brown said low voter turnout for both early voting and voting on Election Day can in part be attributed to the fact that 2019 was an off-election year, meaning there were no races for president, congress, governor, state legislators, or any other "big name" races to draw larger voter turnouts.

Local 1180's Legislative Coordinator John O'Malley, who spent many months in Albany during this year's legislative session tracking early voting bills, said many consider 2019 early voting to have been the test run for next year's much larger races.

"The 2020 presidential and congressional elections are expected to attract possible record voter turnout," O'Malley said. "By having our trial run of early voting in 2019 when everyone knew turnout was going to be low, the city and state Boards of Elections were able to work out any kinks and voters themselves were able to see firsthand the advantages of getting to the polls well ahead of election day itself."

Several Local 1180 members said they were surprised by the new technology they found at the early voting locations when they arrived. Poll workers were equipped with tablets they used as electronic poll books instead of the cumbersome paper books from yesteryear. Once a poll worker confirmed a voter's registration, an individualized ballot for the voter's election district was printed, the voter filled out the ballot, and then inserted it into a scanner.

According to Local 1180 member Heather Logan (Director, Cash Assistance Center), workers at the polling location she voted at were all pleasant and amenable to answering everyone's questions.

"The wait time was less than one minute. The staff and police were very friendly. They were eager to answer any questions that I posed to them. After my great experience, I recommended all my family and friends to take advantage of the early voting. I am happy to say that those who took advantage were very satisfied. Those that waited until Election Day were disappointed. They were met with long lines and confusing directions from the poll workers due to the stress of the long wait times," Logan said.

PAA Delores S. Smith-Johnson agreed. "I thought the process was great. The site for my area was very organized, there were no long lines, and the workers had no problem signing in the voters using the new system. The tablets made it easier for both the workers and the voters, especially if voters had their cards that allowed them to skip the information table and allowed the tablet to read the barcode on the card. That way the voter's information came right up. If they didn't have their card, the poll workers knew how to pull up the information for the voters. The one thing I saw that needed to be revised was I think there should be two tablets at each of the ED/AD tables."

Smith-Johnson said she would definitely encourage others to vote early going forward. In fact, in 2020, there will be 27 days of early voting: nine days ahead of the presidential primary on April 28, and nine more for the state and federal primaries on June 23. The general election on November 3 will have nine days of early voting as well. Local 1180's Brown said that the union will once again be instituting a huge push next year for members to take advantage of early voting to avoid long lines.

"It's just so much more convenient to participate in early voting when you can go on a weekend, or even a weekday when the lines are significantly shorter," Brown said. "Voting is your right and your responsibility as an American citizen; yet, far too many do not partake in the process because of the obstacles in getting to the polls and casting your vote. Early voting's goal is to increase voter participation and that is the message we will be sending to our members next year in particular since it is a presidential election year."

In New York, more than a third of eligible voters are not registered. The state also has one of the lowest voter turnouts across the country, ranking 48th for turnout in the 2018 midterm elections, with less than half of its 12.7 million registered voters participating in last year's state legislative, congressional, and gubernatorial elections, according to City officials.

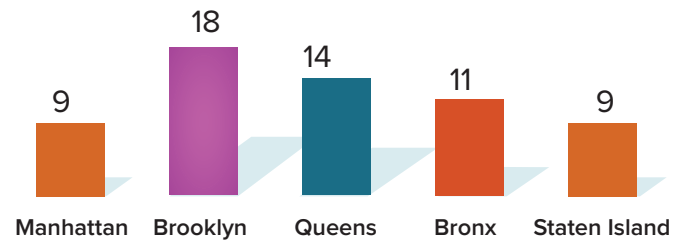
Earlier this year state lawmakers passed voter reform bills that included establishing an early voting system, putting state and federal primary elections on the same day, allowing same-day voter registration, removing a requirement for absentee voters to disclose why they need an absentee ballot, and allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to preregister. Next up on the legislative agenda could be automatic voter registration, whereby unregistered and eligible voters are added to the voter registration rolls with a single interaction at a government agency, for example when visiting the DMV or the Department of Health. This process has been implemented in 15 states, and could register 1.5 million eligible voters in one year, according to advocates.

Brown said all of this would go a long way toward New York putting its money where its mouth is. "We hear all the time about wanting to make it easier for New Yorkers to participate in the voting process. Well, now it's time to actually make it easier. Early voting was the first step but now we need to do more. New York should be a leader, not a follower," Brown said. ■

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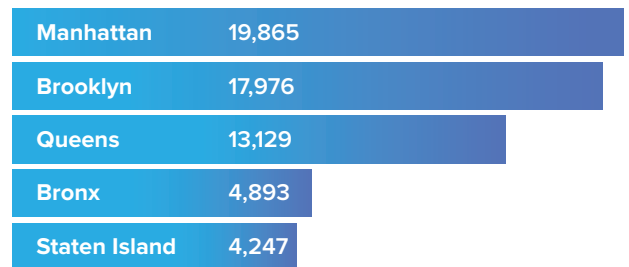
— Heather Logan

### Number of Early POLLING SITES by Borough



\* The law mandates one site per 50,000 registered voters, but doesn't require more than seven sites.

### Number of Early VOTES CAST by Borough



### TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS Per Borough





**Pamela Koller**  
Administrative Manager  
Parks

"I felt like I was a celebrity when I participated in the early voting process close to my home in Long Island City on the Sunday before Election Day. There were absolutely no lines, the workers wore happy faces, and they knew exactly what to do. It was a fun atmosphere and everything was smooth sailing. The reason I did early voting is to make others aware that voting early might be more convenient for them. I worry about how few people I know take voting seriously. I wanted my early vote to be counted in the news, to increase the numbers, and to make a statement. I really do hope we keep the early voting process and that more people show up to vote!"



**Heather Logan**  
Director  
Cash Assistance Center

"Voting on election day is so stressful. The lines are very long, and poll workers are stressed and sometimes angry for these reasons. I wanted my neighbors, who are seniors and disabled, to have a fair chance and get the extra time that they needed to vote early. My elderly father who is 84 years young, resides in Florida and said he loves early voting. My dad says that if it wasn't for early voting, he would not go to the polls. And we all know every vote counts and we must be a part of the solution. I will continue to take part with early voting. I hate stress and I want to ensure that my vote is in without any obstacles."



**Delores S. Smith-Johnson**  
PAA  
Human Resources Administration  
Office of Policies Procedures &  
Training/Training Team Operations

"I think early voting will encourage more New Yorkers to vote early because it allowed voting on the weekend. Those who took advantage of the process didn't have to worry about making it to the polls before 9:00 p.m., especially those who had to work, and they didn't have to rush out the house to make it to the polls before going to work, either. In my opinion the early voting process was a win/win for New York."



**Valerie Deshong-Defour**  
PAA 2  
Department of Finance

"I figured that there wouldn't be long lines. The voting location was right across from my Brooklyn bus stop I use when I go home, and the weather on Election Day was supposed to be cold and rainy. I found early voting to be very efficient. The people were friendly and helpful. They directed you exactly where you needed to go and they were so pleasant. I would recommend it to everyone and I would do it again. I was saddened to see the reports that not many folks took advantage of it but I hope they do it again."



**Ed Adomaitis**  
Retiree

"It was convenient to vote in the nine days that early voting was offered. It was easy and there were no long lines. I would be glad to do it again and suggest everyone take advantage of it. The only thing missing is that you can not vote at any polling site; you must go to your designated location."



**Debra Paylor**  
PAA, H+H  
Local 1180 Member-At-Large

"I took advantage of early voting this year and I loved it. There were no lines and no waiting. The whole process took less than 10 minutes. I would encourage all our members to take advantage of early voting next year when it's going to be a much larger election year and the races are going to be so crucial to labor."