

OPEN PRIMARIES

New York City Charter Revision Commission
Testimony in Support of Open Primaries
Jeremy Gruber, SVP Open Primaries
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Chairwoman and Members of the Commission-

My name is Jeremy Gruber and I am the Senior Vice President of Open Primaries. Open Primaries is a national non-profit organization dedicated to more open and inclusive election systems. I'm also a NYer, having lived here for more than thirty years, own my home, raised my kids here, and dutifully pay my city taxes. First and foremost though I'm a registered independent voter and in our city that means I can't vote in the primaries.

As New Yorkers we see it every election season-candidates politicking ahead of the primaries and then seemingly on vacation after. Because the primary is the only election that really matters in our city. Our primaries are taxpayer funded and government administered. And yet 1 million independent voters like me are shut out. The scale of that impact can not be overestimated. Ten states-20% of all states-have less than a million TOTAL registered voters. Imagine if every registered voter in Vermont or Hawaii or Delaware or Rhode Island was denied a meaningful vote. That's the scale of impact of NY's closed primaries.

We're so far behind this issue. 36 states (New Mexico passed statewide open primaries just this week) and 85% of cities like Los Angeles and Chicago already have open elections. It's the standard way cities run their elections in this country. Closed municipal primaries are such an aberration that no one even studies them.

As an election law expert, I travel around the country working with cities and states that are debating how to establish equal rights for independents and passing reforms. They're doing so because our country is facing two hard truths-

First- that independents are the fastest growing group of voters in our city, state and country-now the largest group of voters nationwide and

Second-for most races the general election is so uncompetitive, oftentimes to the point of being uncontested-that the primary election is the only election that matters.

Yet in our city and state, where calls for equality and democracy are part of everyday conversation, the silence from the political class on these issues is deafening.

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We bemoan why voter participation in NYC is one of the lowest in the country and why millions of dollars in general election get-out-the-vote efforts consistently underperform. It's because no one wants to vote in an election that doesn't matter.

All the research shows that voter participation goes up in open primaries. The Bipartisan Policy Center among others issues reports that consistently find that to be the case. If you let more people vote, participation goes up-that's simple math. What's less appreciated is how broadly voter participation goes up. Because it's not just the primaries. Studies show that voter participation goes up in the general election as well. That's because once you establish a culture of voting-every election is impacted.

It's no coincidence that the two fastest growing groups of voters in our city-Asian Americans and Latinos-are also the two fastest growing groups of independent voters. Over half our city's millennial and Gen Z voters are independent as well. When you shut out NYC independents you aren't just shutting out people who look like me-you're shutting out the full diversity that makes our city so great.

Opening the primaries will create real political opportunities for our city. As my friend David Holt, Mayor of Oklahoma City and Leader of the US Conference of Mayors has said- "Open primary systems foster collaboration and bridge building in the service of finding solutions. Closed systems foster zero-sum game competition and partisan rivalry."

One final reflection-as you tackle this issue I urge you not to get mired in the many forms of open primaries. At its very simplest, open primaries are about letting all voters vote. Start there and let us vote.

Thank you.