

Resolution on Date of Buffalo Board of Education Election

Introduced by: Sharon Belton-Cottman, President & Ferry District Member; Lawrence Scott, Member-at-Large; & Terrance Heard, Member-at-Large

August 21, 2019

Whereas, the New York State Legislature approved bills (50224B & A04949-B) to change the Buffalo Board of Education Election from the month of May to the month of November;

Whereas, all New York Assembly Members, but one, voted in opposition of the bill;

Whereas, the Assembly bill initially ignored the elected terms of the most recent Board of Education Election on May 7, 2019 and called for a new election in November of 2020;

Whereas, the claimed motives driving the change in the election date are low voter turnout and teacher union endorsements;

Whereas, the voter turnout for the election on May 7, 2019 was 7%;

Whereas, most surrounding suburban school districts had an even lower turnout than the city of Buffalo (i.e. West Seneca= 5%, Amherst= <1%, Cheektowaga= <1%, Clarence= 6%, and Lancaster= 5%);

Whereas, many of the union endorsed candidates were elected in these suburban districts;

Whereas, the four contested primary races for Buffalo Common Council held on the changed primary date of June 24, 2019, only had an average turnout of 12%;

Whereas, the contested primary for Mayor in 2017 saw a turnout of just 9% in the city of Buffalo;

Whereas, the NYS Legislature bill does not lower the required amount of petition signatures (500 for sub-district and 1000 for at-large), even after the required signature amounts were lowered for city and county offices, making it difficult for candidates to qualify for the ballot and hampering get out the vote efforts;

Whereas, the Buffalo Board of Education Election is non-partisan and a change to a November election date will consequently result in this non-partisan election being held in conjunction with a partisan election;

Whereas, no current Buffalo Board of Education Members were consulted on the bill to change the date of the election;

Whereas, a November election and January swearing in would give new Board members a limited amount of time to understand the complexities of the School District and a short time frame of developing a budget.

Resolved, the Buffalo Board of Education requests that Governor Andrew Cuomo not sign off on the bill to change the date of the election to November and that our local state delegation consult with a broader community voice, inclusive of the Buffalo Board of Education, to more comprehensively and effectively address voter turnout in Buffalo Board of Education Elections.