

Voting, Democracy and Representation

We must fight for expanded voting access, equal representation in all fields, and transparency in our government and business so that leaders and elected officials understand and address women's needs.

Many political leaders consider concerns over access to child care, reproductive healthcare, and equal pay as special interests or “women’s issues.” As long as our leaders and structures continue to devalue “women’s work” and degrade the ability to realize bodily autonomy, these issues will continue to be daily struggles that reinforce a culture of sexual harassment, assault, poverty, and domestic violence. Without equal access to the vote and robust representation, women and gender expansive people will continue to be marginalized by a democracy that treats them as less than.

For more than 100 years, women fought for the right to vote; and even after ratification of the 19th amendment, Black women, other women of color, and women in poverty faced insurmountable challenges to securing access to the ballot, including language and location based obstacles. Today these barriers continue to exist as many states create and implement restrictions that limit access to voting. It wasn't until 2019 that New York State passed critical legislation that allows for early voting. This enfranchised thousands of voters who were otherwise unable to vote on election day because of childcare issues or inflexible work hours. There remains a lot New York can do to fully enfranchise voters.

Early voting offers people the opportunity to vote on their own terms, however, when implemented voting sites were less accessible to low income and rural communities across the state. The COVID-19 pandemic left many locales struggling to make accommodations so voters could cast their ballot without risking their health. Despite the fact that New York quickly adjusted the absentee voting process to allow all people the option, many voters around the state were unable to vote in the June primary. Ballots were lost in the mail, never sent to voters, or arrived with only partial or incorrect documents. We must ensure greater access to the vote and secure representation in elective office that reflects community needs, especially Black and Brown communities who continue to be targeted for disenfranchisement.

To change policy makers' priorities, we must also create transparency in our government processes and decision-making. Although women make up more than 50% of the state's population, only 32% of our state elected officials are women, a very small percent being women of color. And while gender identity is no guarantee of

RECOMMENDATIONS

- + **New York State must ensure equitable access to poll sites** during early voting and on election day, especially in communities of color.
- + **Absentee voting processes must be improved** so that any voter can request to vote absentee and have a tangible way to track the status of their vote. New York voters should not have to provide an “excuse” to vote by absentee.
- + **The removal of barriers to running for office.** New York must elect more women and people of color into public office so that issues of equity and equal opportunity are treated as priorities rather than special interests. Instituting Proportional Voting is one mechanism.
- + **Follow through on implementation of new public financing of elections program** to ensure money is not an obstacle for candidates and bring political power to all New Yorkers.
- + **Public companies must report on their board and management diversity annually** and should have a plan for the advancement of women, especially women of color, and gender expansive people, and data to track and monitor its progress.

progressive values, studies show that women's political leadership tends to focus on our key issues and is more inclusive and collaborative.

Similarly, the lack of equal access to leadership positions in business, academia, sports and all arenas diminishes opportunities and economic security for women, gender expansive people, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Research affirms that inclusive leadership and diverse teams attract and retain talent, lead to better decision making, break down stereotypes, and improve the bottom line for companies, individuals and, ultimately, the larger community.