



LIGHTHOUSE®
INTERNATIONAL

To: **The Honorable Martin J. Golden**
 The Honorable Diane Savino
 The Honorable Simcha Felder
 The Honorable Andrew Lanza

From: **Lester Marks,**
 Director of Government Affairs and Administration

Date: **April 30, 2013**

Re: **S4088A**

I am writing to express Lighthouse International's concern with S4088A, an act to amend the election law in relation to authorizing the use of mechanical voting machines for non-federal elections in the city of New York. As you are well aware, the mechanical voting machines operated in New York City up until only a few years ago were not-usable by people who are blind or visually impaired, as well as other disabilities. For obvious reasons, someone who is blind or visually impaired had difficulty reading the ballot and casting their vote independently. A person who is blind or visually impaired under the old system had to rely on the assistance from a friend or poll worker to cast their ballot, which is clearly not an independent process. Many other voters, who could not access the mechanical voting machines, simply stayed home and did not vote.

To comply with federal guidelines and to ensure a universally accessible voting system, New York City phased out their mechanical voting machines, in favor of the ES&S AutoMARK Device. The new devices permit all voters, regardless of ability, to use the same system, and to cast their vote both independently and privately. The act of casting a ballot both independently and privately is a basic right afforded to every American citizen. For far too long this right was not available to people who are blind or visually impaired and returning to this mechanical system would be a major step backwards.

It appears that the impetus for returning to the inaccessible mechanical voting machines is because the New York City Board of Elections' dysfunction and shortfalls administering past elections. The dysfunction at the New York City Board of Elections has been well documented and a holistic approach to reforming the Board and restoring confidence in New York City election results seems to be a sounder public policy approach than returning to a failed inaccessible system.

We share a desire for elections that are administered efficiently and yield results that are trusted. We also share a desire for people who are blind or visually impaired to be able to fully participate in the electoral process, both independently and privately. A return to the mechanical system is the wrong approach.