

# SUSPENSION

## A RESOLUTION TO BE SUBMITTED BY LEGISLATOR SAVAGE

### **RE: Moving School Board Elections to November**

WHEREAS, the recent City of Buffalo school board election highlights the need for change in order to increase voter participation, interest and turnout in an election that determines not only the direction of the decision-making body for City schools, it also determines responsibility and oversight of a budget that, annually, is fast approaching one billion dollars of public money; and

WHEREAS, greater participation and voter interest could result by changing the date of school board elections from May to November; and

WHEREAS, with so much at stake in terms of providing students with a quality education, determining who will oversee significant operating budgets, as well considering the cost to taxpayers to conduct school board elections in the month of May when voter turnout has proven to be light, it would seem to make sense to elect members of the school board when a higher percentage of residents turn out to vote in the November general election; and

WHEREAS, indeed, traditional fall campaigns and November general elections – when voters are more attentive to campaigns and more motivated to participate and vote – is an appropriate alternative to springtime school board elections if the goal of increased voter participation is the objective for policy makers; and

WHEREAS, a scant 9.6% of the City's approximately 140,000 eligible voters participated in the May 3, 2016 election for six district representatives for the Buffalo Board of Education, while only 9% participated in 2013 for these same district contests, and 13% turned out to vote in 2014 when candidates vied for three City-wide at-large seats on the Buffalo school board; and

WHEREAS, suburban school districts also struggle with apathy and an unfortunate lack of interest in school board elections, while at the same time voice understandable concern about property taxes where school taxes far exceed the local and County percentage of their property tax bills – in other words, suburban residents are simply not participating in school board elections that essentially lead to public policy with the greatest effect on their property taxes; and

WHEREAS, while springtime school board elections aim to be non-partisan and parent orientated, the exact opposite has occurred when low voter turnout effectively favors non-traditional yet well-funded special interest candidacies and candidates sponsored by political groups; and

WHEREAS, it remains appropriate to ensure non-partisan school board elections that favor parent activists over partisan politics, and moving school board elections to November could maintain such non-partisanship by means such as offering voters a separate ballot or placing the non-partisan school board ballot on the opposite side of the traditional ballot; and

WHEREAS, the cost to taxpayers exceeds \$100,000 to conduct the May school board election in the City of Buffalo, and when combined with suburban school board elections, which are conducted on varying dates and are also facilitated by the Erie County Board of Elections, the total cost adds up to a considerable amount of public dollars that could be saved if these important elections were moved to November; and

WHEREAS, State Legislature action is necessary in order to change school board elections from springtime to the November General Election, therefore, hearing from officials from the Erie County Board of Elections and other concerned stakeholders at a meeting of this Legislative Body's Government Affairs Committee of the costs, logistics and legislative procedures necessary to effectuate such a change would be prudent and appropriate.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that in consideration of all the facts outlined in this resolution, that this Legislative Body calls on the New York State Legislature to consider moving the date of school board elections from the current springtime voting to the November general election; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this Legislature request the Erie County Board of Elections to weigh in with a response concerning this proposal, together with their comments and implications of moving school board elections to November; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Legislature forward certified copies of this resolution to the Western New York Delegation to the State Legislature, and to the Commissioners of the Erie County Board of Elections.

FISCAL IMPACT: None for resolution.