

Testimony for the Commission on Government Efficiency

Submitted by: Max Bissonnette

Hello. Thank you to the Commission for the opportunity to testify. My name is Max Bissonnette, and I am 17 years old, which means I can't vote. Despite this, I've been registered as an independent since I was 16. In fact, across America, 56% of Gen Z voters are independent (Gallup). In New York City alone, nearly half of our unaffiliated voters are Gen Z or Millennials (NYCCFB). The fact, that we don't have open primaries, is a crisis when it comes to young people voting.

In the New York City Public High School system, we have a week called "Civics Week," where high schoolers like myself get involved with things like participatory budgeting, civic education presentations, and early voter registration. This is a city that distinctly encourages youth civic engagement. Yet, at the same time, many of us are shut out from what is arguably the most important election in New York City because we aren't aligned with a party. How can we get young people civically involved, when we are being denied a meaningful vote?

Of course, I'm not the only independent in my circle. I come from a family of independent and unaffiliated voters. Actually, my mom had to explain to me when I was still in elementary school why she could not vote in the primaries. My father isn't even registered at all because he is aware of how little power independents have in this primary voting system. I have teachers in my school teaching U.S. History and Government, who are educated and deeply involved in our democracy, that have confessed they're registered as Democrats because they can't vote in our primaries as an independent.

And, this issue isn't isolated to just my closest communities. During the recent primary election, I was a regular volunteer on a campaign. While canvassing, I spoke with many independent voters who supported a candidate and cared deeply about the issues presented but simply were not allowed to vote. It's not that independents aren't involved in our local politics, or that we don't believe in certain candidates each election cycle. It's that we aren't given a voice to participate. We are informed and we are engaged. We are 1.2 million New Yorkers, not counting the future voters my age who are registered unaffiliated but are excited to vote when the time comes. We future voters lead protests, we volunteer, we are journalists and debate club members and Model UN delegates. We have beliefs, we are political, and we want to vote in a primary someday.

So, I urge the Commission to put a proposal for open primaries before the voters this fall, one where independent voters can choose a party's ballot without needing to register as said party. I hope I'll be able to vote in a primary election when I am old enough. We are more than ready to vote, this city just needs to let us.