

County comptroller issues special report on implementation of early voting in Dutchess

Calls on state representatives to explore and expand voting alternatives in light of pandemic

Dutchess County Comptroller Robin Lois last week released a special accounting report covering the costs associated with early voting implementation in Dutchess County. Early voting was among a series of Voting Reform bills signed into law early in 2019, designed to provide greater access to voting in New York, which historically has had some of the lowest voter turnout in the nation.

“Engaging in the democratic process of electing local, state and federal representatives is among one of our most important rights and responsibilities,” said Lois.

The general election in November 2019 was the first and only election thus far to

have early voting; there were nine early voting days from Oct. 26 to Nov. 3 at a total of five polling places. In 2020 there will be a total of 27 early voting days due to the Presidential Primary on April 28, the Federal, State and Local Primary on June 23, and the General Election on Nov. 3.

“These additional voting days will result in a significant increase in expenses when compared to 2019,” added Lois.

In 2019, early voting turnout accounted for 4.3-percent of total voters, with total general election turnout of 39.14 percent - a relatively low turnout rate. 2020 is a Presidential Election year, an election year which typically has the highest turnout of the four-year cycle.

The comptroller is releasing this report as the state and the nation grapple with responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is beginning to dramatically affect our day-to-day lives.

“It is important voters have easy access to exercise their civic duty and right of voting without fear of risk to their personal

health,” said Lois. “While it remains to be seen if early voting is an economically viable solution, given the public health crisis which we are currently facing I implore our state representatives to explore and consider other methods of voting, such as ‘no excuse’ absentee voting or vote-by-

mail options.”

A full copy of the report is publicly available to view or download at www.dutchessny.gov; from the “Government” tab, select “All Departments” and find “Comptroller” in the alphabetical listing.

NY, NJ, CT governors issue uniform limits

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will temporarily close movie theaters, gyms and casinos, until further notice.

This uniform approach to social distancing is meant to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19.

“Our primary goal right now is to slow the spread of this virus so that the wave of new infections doesn’t crash our healthcare system, and everyone agrees social distancing is the best way to do that,” Governor Cuomo said. “This is not a war that can be won alone, which is why New York is partnering with our neighboring states to implement a uniform standard that not only keeps our people safe but also prevents ‘state shopping’ where residents of one state travel to another and vice versa. I have called on the federal government to implement nationwide protocols but in their absence we are taking this on ourselves.”

Governor Murphy said, “With all we are seeing in our state - and across our nation and around the world - the time for us to take our strongest, and most direct, actions to date to slow the spread of coronavirus is now. I’ve said many times over the past several days that, in our state, we are going to get through this as one New Jersey family. But if we’re all in this together, we must work with our neighboring states to act together. The work against coronavirus isn’t just up to some of us, it’s up to all of us.”

Governor Lamont said, “The only way to effectively fight the spread of COVID-19 is by working together as states. We have shared interests, and a patchwork of closures and restrictions is not the best way forward. I know that because of this collaboration, we will save lives.”

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Resiliency dominates as friends, relatives in Italy describe conditions

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Residents in Rome stand in line outside a grocery store, albeit with sufficient distance. Photo courtesy of Michael Spirito

of a lockdown really means.

Mazzarelli is right.

It’s terrible – for now.

Italy was the first country to go into lockdown as it continues to be devastated by the virus. Michael Spirito, a friend of Wappingers resident Heather Gleason-Berry, is originally from New York himself and moved to Rome five years ago to teach English at a local Italian school.

When talk began two weeks ago that schools would be closing down, Spirito said to himself, ‘Hmmm, a week at home might not be so bad.’

“Be careful what you wish for, as they say,” Spirito said.

Soon after schools closed, businesses followed.

“The only things open here for us to warrant leaving the house is grocery stores and pharmacies. No one is working. The grocery stores are only allowing about 25 customers in at a time. You must wait outside,” Spirito said, referring to the picture he took of a long line at a grocery store. “Inside the store they have put down black tape to help you judge how close you should be to the person in front of you. It feels like we are in a war of sorts. The atmosphere is eerie and quiet. You must also remember that Italy is much different than the States. If you don’t work, you don’t get paid regardless the circumstance. This is going to affect many lives.”

Gianpasquale Cusano is Mazzarelli’s uncle. Unlike bustling big-city Rome where Spirito is, Cusano and his family live in Vitulano, a small village of about 3,000 residents in the province of Benevento Campania in southern Italy.

He, too, can only leave the house for food, health reasons and work.

“State measures have become increasingly restrictive and currently very few people are working. Most of the offices are closed,” Cusano said in an email exchange. “If you go out to shop, you must have a self-certification with you and you must respect safety distances in the shop.”

Cusano said that where he is, residents are being physically tested by the virus and the cuts in healthcare, especially the elderly,

“The greatest danger that comes from this virus is for people already physically tested by health problems, such as the elderly,” Cusano said. “The fault of this spending review is partly due to the central Italian government in recent years, but above all due to European economic policies. Meanwhile, we find that the aid arrived for this emergency does not come from Europe, but from China (where the virus originated in the Wuhan Province).”

Another Benevento resident is Edoardo Scarinzi, an exchange student who lived in Dutchess County with Mazzarelli before moving back to Milan to continue his studies and then relocating in Benevento because of the increasing number of coronavirus cases in northern Italy, near Milan.

His university was closed three weeks ago; the lockdown was implemented about a week ago.

“Life now is very unusual,” he said. “We cannot leave our houses without a work reason or to buy food or any necessary thing or to go to the doctor. It’s not too clear if it’s permitted to go for a walk, but I think so because I’ve gone to the mountain today and nobody said anything. The police are controlling the streets and you have to show them a declaration of what you’re going to do. If it’s not something absolutely necessary, they can put you in jail for three months – though it will never happen. More realistically, they will fine you.”

Scarinzi said he is trying to be realistic and pragmatic about the situation.

“In my opinion, this emergency will go on for a lot, probably until June,” he said.

But he’s also trying to remain upbeat, as are Spirito and Cusano.

In fact, while exchanging emails with SDN, Cusano’s young daughter asked him what he was doing. He told her that he was answering questions from an American journalist about the virus and their day-to-day lives right now. That prompted the young girl to draw a picture with a note on it. She asked her father to scan it and attach it to a reply email to the journalist.

The picture was a rainbow with the Italian words, “Andra Tutto Bene.”

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