



# Appointments

## BOL Meeting Minutes - Final

Committee Chair: James Nolan

800 Michaelan Office Bldg.  
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor  
White Plains, NY 10601  
[www.westchesterlegislators.com](http://www.westchesterlegislators.com)

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Thursday, March 3, 2022

4:00 PM

Committee Room

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### CALL TO ORDER

*The County Board will meet pursuant to Chapter 417 of New York State Laws of 2021, allowing public bodies to meet and take action without permitting in-person public access to meetings and authorizes such meetings and public hearings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service, provided the public has the ability to view or listen and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed. To access the meeting, please visit: <https://westchestercountyny.legistar.com>*

*With a quorum present, Chair Nolan called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM.*

*Others in Attendance: GUESTS: Commissioner Richard Wishnie and Commissioner Tajian Nelson; BOL: Legislator Tyrae Woodson-Samuels, Legislator Damon Maher, Legislator MaryJane Shimsky (remote), Legislator Margaret Cunzio (remote), Melanie Montalto and Dayana Gómez*

**Present:** Committee Chair Nolan, Legislator Barr, Legislator Borgia and Legislator Pierce

**Remote:** Legislator Clements and Committee Vice-Chair Johnson

### MINUTES APPROVAL

1. Monday, February 14, 2021 4:00pm

On motion of Legislator Pierce, seconded by Legislator Borgia, the above item was approved. The motion carried unanimously.

### I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. [2022-56](#) **APPT-Commissioner of Dept. of Emergency Services-Wishnie**

A RESOLUTION appointing Richard Wishnie as the Commissioner of the Westchester County Department of Emergency Services, effective January 1, 2022.

**Submitted by COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS**

*Commissioner Wishnie appeared before the committee to discuss his qualifications for this appointment. He shared having been Acting Commissioner for the Department of Emergency Services for the past 16 months. During this time, he has contributed to a lot of work done some of which involved infrastructure, staffing and other needs that move the department in the right direction. The department runs practically seven days a week and 24 hours a day tending to areas relating to fire, emergency services, trainings, office of emergency management and heavy involvement with the pandemic, in addition to addressing community needs.*

Chairwoman Borgia and Legislator Pierce expressed gratitude for Commissioner Wishnie while in service for this position. Legislator Cunzio added that Commissioner Wishnie is a great motivator to his staff and team, as well as a solid problem-solver in many situations. Chair Nolan and Legislator Barr also added to the previous sentiments with personal anecdotes while connecting with Commissioner Wishnie.

Legislator Maher asked if he feels that he has the resources necessary, personnel and equipment, to address issues such as overflowing rivers up north as climate change continues to progress. Commissioner Wishnie responded that he has been in discussion about how to address these issues and feels that they are prepared to respond accordingly. Despite having issues this year, he feels strongly that the department is prepared to handle such issues in conjunction with other departments when necessary.

On motion of Legislator Borgia, seconded by Legislator Pierce, the above item was signed by committee. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Committee Chair Nolan, Legislator Barr, Legislator Borgia, Legislator Clements, Committee Vice-Chair Johnson and Legislator Pierce

2. [2022-100](#) **APPT - Commissioner of Elections - Nelson**

A RESOLUTION appointing Tajian M. Nelson as the Commissioner of Elections for a term to begin immediately upon approval by the Board of Legislators and ending December 31, 2022.  
**Submitted by COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS**

Commissioner Nelson appeared before the committee to discuss her qualifications for this appointment. She began by sharing her extensive professional experiences and how she eventually ended up working at the Board of Elections in 2004. She obtained a great deal of knowledge regarding all matters pertaining to elections related matters. She is currently the Acting Deputy Commissioner and as such she has been able to authorize signing off on paperwork and administrative duties as defined by the Commissioner's office, she also works with the elections programs, signs off on bills and invoices, etc. Main duties elections operations include: handling the Democrat and Working Families parties (while the other parties are split down the middle as a bipartisan Board), provides petition information, helps create ballot structures, she is responsible for the newspaper elections notices and serves as liaison for the Board of Elections, to name a few of her responsibilities. In her current experience she has connected with several departments in the County to ensure that everyone is well-informed on election details and dates.

Legislator Pierce asked Commissioner Nelson to share on her goals moving forward. Commissioner Nelson shared that she would like to create a voter outreach program for high school students to educate them on early voter registration in addition to outreach for college students to recruit more elections inspectors. She would also like to set up voter education programs with local community organizations to have a direct connection to the public, they will establish a bilingual and a disability advisory boards to ensure that there is no disenfranchisement to those voters, they also will increase their outreach on social media through various platforms and she also expressed wanting to update the website to ensure that it is efficient and will review the current polling sites, especially now since they lost some locations due to the pandemic.

*Chairwoman Borgia asked if Commissioner Nelson decided on splitting the day for poll worker recruiter. Commissioner Nelson responded that she and Commissioner Coltey are considering putting a test pilot program this year in some areas to see how that will be. Once they have some results she can provide updates. Chairwoman Borgia also expressed gratitude for the Commissioner and her efforts.*

*Legislator Johnson shared some anecdotes about Commissioner Nelson and the value of her being in this position. He continued with an explanation on how the Board of Elections functions and the responsibilities while also doing so in a partnership.*

*Legislator Maher expressed having sent Commissioner Nelson an outline of some questions that some elections law advocates forwarded to him. He detailed two points for her to address around the realm of willingness to work with the public for transparency and the other involved cybersecurity threat. Commissioner Nelson shared that she is willing and open to work with the public and as for cybersecurity she is aware of the threat and is working in conjunction with the County IT Department and the State's IT Department to ensure that the Board of Elections' infrastructure is secure and that staff is properly trained on handling such issues. Legislator Maher asked the Commissioner to explain what happened last year with the voter postcards. She responded that legally the Board of Elections is required to notify people of voting with MailChimp, which happens in April and only sends the postcard if the person's address or their polling location changes. In 2020 and 2021, between the Governor's executive orders and legislative bills they required the Board to provide continuous notification which people later got used to. As a result, more notification is being considered to go out moving forward to ensure that the public is notified more often, despite it not being a requirement. Legislator Maher asked if there are other economical ways to promote that people go out to vote. Commissioner Nelson reiterated some of her methods in doing so and that she is open to input and feedback if anyone has some. Legislator Maher asked Commissioner Nelson to address the blank and void ballots in the Presidential election from 2020. Commissioner Nelson explained that after receiving those complaints, they did some research and found that the tabulation of the votes, they discovered that it was manual error by Board of Elections staff. This caused a mix up that went into a header card which is what drives the Abscan ballot machines. The ballots went into the incorrect districts. Because of this the Board instituted additional steps to avoid this issue in the future from happening again, which so far has been working effectively. They are also improving technology that will also remove additional error.*

*Legislator Woodson-Samuels, Legislator Barr, Legislator Clements and Chair Nolan expressed gratitude to Commissioner Nelson for her service to the Board. Legislator Shimsky concurred and shared some encouraging words for the Commissioner for this new experience.*

On motion of Legislator Pierce, seconded by Committee Vice-Chair Johnson, the above item was signed by committee. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Committee Chair Nolan, Legislator Barr, Legislator Borgia, Legislator Clements, Committee Vice-Chair Johnson and Legislator Pierce

## **II. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **III. RECEIVE & FILE**

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Legislator Barr, seconded by Legislator Borgia, the Committee adjourned at 4:59pm.