



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 17, 2017

Contact: Dick Dadey
ddadey@citizensunionfoundation.org
(917) 709-2896

NEWS STATEMENT

Civic Groups Hail New York State Assembly Passage of Package of Comprehensive Voting Reforms

Five good government groups applauded the New York State Assembly's passage on Monday and Wednesday, of a package of nine bills aimed to make voting easier and more accessible for New York State by removing barriers that actually make it difficult for voters to cast their ballots. These reforms include early voting, no-excuse absentee voting, designated agency-based automatic registration, statewide voter registration transfers, and legislation that would establish an electronic voter registration process and allow for online voter registration. In addition to these reforms, the Assembly has already passed the Voter Friendly Ballot Act, a bill that makes ballots easier to read and understand. This is the second year in a row that the Assembly has taken the initiative to pass common sense election legislation that will benefit all voters in New York State.

With only 29% of its eligible voters turning out to vote in 2014 and 57% in 2016, New York State continues to be among the worst states in the nation in voter turnout and participation, ranking 49th and 41st respectively in those two years. To combat declining voter participation, New York needs to enact legislation that will remove barriers that voters face on Election Day. Allowing voters to vote on Election Day and up to 7 days before an election, or vote via absentee ballot without having to provide a legally permitted reason, will give voters the opportunity to cast their ballots when it is most convenient for them and in the manner most convenient during election season. Agency-based automatic registration, wherein designated agency applications will also serve as voter registrations, statewide voter registration transfers, and electronic and online voter registration will make registering to vote and keeping one's registration easier and will help to modernize New York's restrictive voter registration process. The Voter Friendly

Ballot Act is a much-needed reform that will remove unnecessary text and political party emblems from already cluttered ballots. We are pleased to see this package of bills pass in the Assembly and hope that the Senate will pass these reforms before the session ends.

“The Assembly today took a desperately needed step to improve the way New Yorkers vote. New York's decades-long inability to pass much-needed election reforms is a form of passive voter suppression which has led New York to have among the lowest voter turnout rates in the country. Now, it is incumbent on the Senate to act swiftly to pass this legislation and ensure that New Yorkers can vote over more days and in more ways making it easier for them to cast their ballots. These are simple ways to modernize elections and enable our democracy to meet the contemporary needs of the electorate.”

- Dick Dadey, Executive Director, Citizens Union

“We are pleased that the Assembly has chosen to pass this package of bills now rather than waiting for the end of June. By passing these reforms ahead of Memorial Day break, the Assembly has shown their commitment to implementing voting reforms that will enfranchise voters and ensure all New Yorkers have equal ballot access. We applaud the Assembly for passing these reforms and hope that the Senate will act quickly in taking up this legislation in their house.”

- Jennifer Wilson, Program and Policy Director, League of Women Voters of NYS

"At a time when voting rights are under attack across the country, our elected representatives need to stand up to that assault and make it easier for eligible New Yorkers to vote and be heard. We've got some of the lowest voter participation rates in the country. Today the Assembly took an important step to change that, and the Members who voted in favor of a better democracy should be applauded. We call on the rest of our state's elected leaders to do their part to enact these reforms into law, now.”

- Chisun Lee, Senior Counsel for the Democracy Program, Brennan Center for Justice

“This common-sense legislation will make it easier for New Yorkers to participate in our democracy while enhancing the experience for voters at the polls,” said Alex Camarda, Senior Policy Consultant at Reinvent Albany. “We applaud the Assembly for passing this legislation and encourage both the Assembly and Senate to reach an agreement on legislation so New York will no longer trail most of the country in reforming election administration.”

- Alex Camarda, Senior Policy Consultant, ReInvent Albany

"For far too long, New York's has been at the bottom of the nation's barrel when it comes to voter participation. It's long past time for Albany to get to work and fix this problem. We applaud the package advanced by the Assembly and urge real discussions to move New York from the nation's 'caboose' to its 'engine' when it comes to voting."

- Blair Horner, Executive Director, NYPIRG