

**BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE
CITIZENS UNION
COMMON CAUSE NEW YORK
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (NYPIRG)
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEW YORK STATE
REINVENT ALBANY**

**MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT
A2097-B (Hevesi) /S3046-B (Marcellino)**

January 14, 2014

Title

An Act to amend the legislative law, in relation to requiring that committee and floor votes be made available online and that session and committee meetings be webcast.

Statement of Support

Our groups have long advocated for transparency in government and greater openness in the state legislature in particular.

This legislation will require, to the extent practicable, that all committee meetings held by either house of the legislature be webcast. Legislative committees consider and vote on measures impacting the entire state at meetings, and webcasting their proceedings will enable the public across the state to better follow the actions of the state legislature in Albany. It will also enable the press, which is increasingly stretched thin as profit margins shrink, to cover committee proceedings without physically attending meetings. In enabling the media to more efficiently cover committee votes, New Yorkers will also acquire greater knowledge of legislative actions even when they themselves do not watch committee meetings via webcast. Webcasting also creates efficiencies for legislative and governmental staff, by enabling them to watch committee hearings from their desk while doing other work.

The bill will also require committee and session votes be placed online, to the extent practicable, within 24 hours of their casting, so that the public and media will know how individual lawmakers voted on bills of interest. In order to obtain a comprehensive accounting of votes from the full legislature under current practice, a physical copy of the votes must be obtained from the journal clerk in each house. Putting the votes of individual lawmakers online soon after they have been cast will increase government transparency and accountability.

While our organizations wholeheartedly support this legislation, it could be strengthened further by requiring archiving of videos on governmental websites, clarifying that hearings and forums should be webcast in addition to meetings, clarifying that webcasts should be conducted live, and providing online memos of support or opposition to legislation voted on in committee. Additionally, we would request that the requirement that these videos are posted "within twenty-four hours. . . to the extent

practicable" is clarified to indicate that all videos are posted online, and are posted within twenty-four hours to the extent practicable.

In December 2013, the New York City Council passed and Mayor Bloomberg signed legislation (Int. No. 132-2010) requiring the City Council, city agencies, committees, commissions, and task forces webcast their public proceedings.¹ Our organizations actively advocated for passage of this legislation, and some of our organizations testified in favor of its passage both in 2010 and 2013. The legislation followed administrative action by the City Council in April 2012², which now webcasts its stated meetings and most of its committee hearings and meetings.

The Senate passed this bill during the 2013 session following its introduction for the first time in January. The Assembly indicated last year that it supports the concept but prefers to implement the bill's provisions administratively. Yet the Assembly did not administratively implement its provisions in 2013. We urge the Senate to pass this legislation again. We call on the Assembly to do so also or, at minimum, more quickly implement its provisions administratively so that by the end of the legislative session the Assembly webcasts its committee meetings and post votes online as the Senate does administratively now.

¹ For the text of the NYC legislation, accompanying hearing materials and transcripts, fiscal impact statement, committee reports, and mayor's letter, see <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=657961&GUID=7880F746-C597-416E-BD20-43175D0CD616&Options=Advanced&Search>

² NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL SPEAKER CHRISTINE C. QUINN, COUNCIL MEMBERS & THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT (MOME) ANNOUNCE LIVE TV AND WEB COVERAGE OF CITY COUNCIL HEARINGS MAKING NEW YORK CITY THE LARGEST MUNICIPALITY TO CARRY LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS LIVE. See http://www.council.nyc.gov/html/pr/pr_042712.shtml