

**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF:  
S1381/A1722**

**To:** New York State Assembly and Senate

**Subject:** An act to require amendment proposals and ballot measures to be written in plain and clear language.

**Date:** May 12, 2023

The League of Women Voters of New York State (LWVNYS) supports the above referenced legislation which would require constitutional amendment proposals and ballot measures to be written at a reading level no more complicated than 8<sup>th</sup> grade and that the question will be in an easy to understand yes or no format. This bill will set clear standards for readability and uniformity and allow for public comment before the ballot language is finalized.

Voter's should not be confused when they show up to the polls to vote on election day. Language used on the ballot should be as accessible as possible. According to a 2020 study done by the Department of Education, 54% of adults (aged 16-74) lack literacy proficiency past a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. That percentage is closer to 24% in New York State, meaning millions of New Yorkers that may find it difficult to understand ballot measures as they are currently written<sup>1</sup>. Recent ballot proposals required that voters read at a college level in order to understand the proposal.

For voters with limited English proficiency and non-English speaking voters, simplifying the ballot language will facilitate easier translations and translations that are written at an easily understood reading grade level. This allows for uniformity in terms of how ballot language is displayed and understood by voters. If voters want to make a change to the ballot language currently, they must file a lawsuit. This bill would allow for a public comment period before ballot language is finalized. This will help improve the clarity and accuracy of what appears on the ballot and avoid litigation.

It is not uncommon for folks to walk away from the ballot thinking they have voted in favor of a measure when in fact they have voted against it. There is simply no reason this should be the case and plain language on statewide ballot measures should be enacted. **For the above reasons, the League of Women Voters of New York State urges the Senate and Assembly to pass S1381/A1722.**

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<sup>1</sup> "Literacy Gap Map | Barbara Bush Foundation." *Map.barbarabush.org*, 2019, map.barbarabush.org/#:~:text=What%20does%20adult%20literacy%20look%20like%20in%20your%20state%3F. Accessed 12 May 2023.