

December 30, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President and Majority Leader of the New York State Senate
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the New York State Assembly
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

We write to strongly encourage you to prioritize the passage of A. 4987 and S. 1931 to restore voting rights to all New Yorkers upon release from prison in the 2021 legislative session.

Since our coalition was formed in 2018, restoring voting rights for New Yorkers with past convictions has been one of our top priorities for strengthening our state's democracy. And many of our organizations have been fighting for rights restoration for far longer. While we commend you for the great progress that has been made on many other priorities over the past two years, the legislature's inaction on this fundamental issue has been a glaring omission. Given the shameful history that led to felony disenfranchisement in New York, and the continuing harmful impact of the law on Black and brown communities today, this omission has become even more pronounced as New York, and the nation, have finally begun to grapple more honestly with racial justice in recent months. And while this legislation has lingered in New York, other states like California, Colorado, Nevada, and New Jersey have all changed their policies to allow everyone in the community to vote.

We applauded the Governor for using his executive authority to restore voting rights to people on parole. But his action is no substitute for permanent legislation for several reasons. The current process results in a weeks-long delay between an individual's release from prison and when they get their voting rights back, leaving room for confusion among election officials about who is eligible to vote. It is also discretionary, can be easily rescinded by future governors, and is an inefficient use of government resources.

A. 4987 and S. 1931 would go a long way towards addressing each of these issues. Importantly, by amending New York's election law so that the automatic restoration of voting rights upon release from prison is the law of the land, this legislation would ensure that no one has to rely on a discretionary pardon to vote. Second, by providing notice and an opportunity to register upon an individual's release from prison, the legislation would also ensure that legal restoration of

voting rights results in registration and voting among New Yorkers returning home from prison. Equally important, the legislation would reduce confusion among election officials and prospective voters alike by enacting a simple, bright line rule: if you are living in the community, you can vote.

As our nation's democracy has come under attack, New York can strengthen its commitment to inclusive voting laws by passing A. 4987 and S. 1931. We hope you will prioritize election reform in the coming legislative session, as you have each of the last two years. But as our democracy moves forward, no one should be left behind. We urge you to put rights restoration at the top of your list.

Sincerely,

100 Black Construction Workers
Alliance of Families for Justice
Association of Legal Aid Attorneys
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
Brooklyn Voters Alliance
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College
Center for Popular Democracy
Central in Action Leadership Team, Central Synagogue
Chinese-American Planning Council
Citizen Action of New York
Citizens Union of the City of New York
College and Community Fellowship
Common Cause New York
Community Service Society of New York
Council on American-Islamic Relations, New York (CAIR-NY)
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance
Empire State Indivisible
Equitable Future, Inc.
Exodus Transitional Community
Generation Vote
Indivisible Brooklyn
Inwood Indivisible
John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity
Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
League of Women Voters of New York State
Let NY Vote
Long Island Civic Engagement Table
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Mid-Hudson Valley DSA
MinKwon Center for Community Action
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
New Hour for Women & Children—LI
New York City Jericho Movement

New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)
New York Democratic Lawyers Council
The New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council, AFL-CIO
New York Society for Ethical Culture
New York State Nurses Association
Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson
Parole Preparation Project
Release Aging People in Prison
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)
Rochester Jericho Movement
Stand Up America
VOCAL-NY
VoteEarlyNY