

SUPREME COURT IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
APPELLATE DIVISION: FOURTH DEPARTMENT

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MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member  
of the New York State Assemble, TAWN FEENY and  
SUSAN LUNDGREN,

Plaintiffs-respondents,

v.

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro  
Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, THE  
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
CARL HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly,

Defendants-Appellants,

and

NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS,  
ROBERT ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate,  
WILLIAM BARCLAY, as Minority Leader of the  
Assembly,

Defendants.

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**Appellate Division  
Case/Docket No. CA 24-  
00764**

**Originating Court No.  
000778-2023**

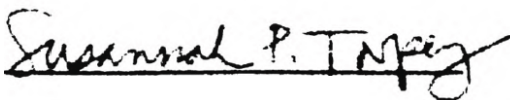
**Notice of Motion for  
Permission to Submit  
Amicus Curiae Brief**

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that, upon the annexed Affirmation of Susannah Torpey, Esq., dated May 31, 2024, and the affidavit of Laura Ladd Bierman, dated May 31, 2024, attached as exhibit B to the Torpey Aff., NONPARTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW YORK will move this Court pursuant to 22 NYCRR 1250.4(f), at the courthouse thereof, located at 50 East Avenue, Rochester, New York 14604, on June 10, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., or as soon as counsel may be heard, for an order granting Proposed Amici leave to file the accompanying brief as *amicus curiae*

in support of Appellant-Defendants THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, et al., in the above-entitled appeal and for such other and further relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: May 31, 2024

**WINSTON AND STRAWN LLP**

By: 

Susannah Torpey, Esq.  
200 Park Avenue, Floor 44  
New York, New York 10166  
T: (212) 294-4690  
storpey@winston.com

*Attorney for Proposed Amici*

TO ALL COUNSEL: VIA NYSCEF

SUPREME COURT IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
APPELLATE DIVISION: FOURTH DEPARTMENT

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MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member  
of the New York State Assemble, TAWN FEENY and  
SUSAN LUNDGREN,

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v.

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro  
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CARL HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly,

Defendants-Appellants,

and

NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS,  
ROBERT ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate,  
WILLIAM BARCLAY, as Minority Leader of the  
Assembly,

Defendants.

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SUSANNAH TORPEY, Esq., an attorney admitted to practice in New York  
State, hereby affirms the truth of the following facts under the penalties of perjury  
pursuant to CPLR § 2106:

1. I am a Partner at Winston and Strawn LLP, attorneys for Non-Party  
League of Women Voters of New York (“League”).

**Appellate Division  
Case/Docket No. CA 24-  
00764**

**Originating Court No.  
000778-2023**

**AFFIRMATION**

2. I have followed and reviewed the events, circumstances, and pleadings of the above captioned case, and as such, am fully familiar with the facts and circumstances of this matter.

3. I submit this Affirmation in support of the League's motion, pursuant to 22 NYCRR 1250.4(f), to appear as *amicus curiae* and leave to file a brief in support of Appellants the Senate of the State of New York, et al. ("Appellants"). Specifically, the League seeks to file an *amicus* brief in support of Appellants' appeal from the Livingston County Supreme Court's Decision and Order (the "Order") in favor of respondents. Submitted herewith as **Exhibit A** are copies of the Decision and Order of the Hon. Daniel J. Doyle, dated May 7, 2024, and the Notice of Appeal with Confirmation Notice, dated May 14, 2024. Submitted herewith as **Exhibit B** is the affidavit of Laura Ladd Bierman, the League's Executive Director, dated May 30, 2024.

4. The League's commitment to educating and empowering women began before this matter commenced. Since 1919, the League has been a nonpartisan, activist, grassroots organization lifting citizens' participation in our democracy.

5. The League's interest in this appeal is grounded in its commitment to achieving equal rights for all. The League engages potential voters, encourages voters to register, and educates them on imperative ballot measures. The League cannot adequately pursue its mission with the ballot measure's status in flux.

6. The at-issue measure would codify protections against discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, and sex—including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes. Moreover, it would protect against actions to curtail women’s reproductive autonomy or their access to reproductive healthcare and would clarify that discrimination based on pregnancy status or outcome is sex-based discrimination. This is imperative considering *Roe v. Wade*’s overruling.

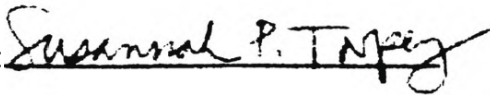
7. The proposed *amicus* brief will assist the Court in evaluating the significant and immeasurable prejudice to voters, who are confused as to the existing ballot measure’s status. Plaintiffs’ delayed action will likewise prejudice coalitions such as New Yorkers for Equal Rights, of which the League is a member, who have expended significant resources and effort to mobilize voters to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (“ERA”) this November. Were Plaintiffs to prevail, voter registration and turnout may drop, voters will continue to be confused and less informed on the pertinent issue, and the measure may ultimately fail. There is no guarantee that the ballot initiative would survive the processes in the New York legislative chambers again were the Court to require its proponents to restart the legislative process. Furthermore, the amendment would not appear on the ballot concurrently with a Presidential election, which could vastly diminish voter turnout, as well as the likelihood that the ERA will pass.

8. The League respectfully submits that the Livingston County Supreme Court's Order was erroneous and will have significant, immeasurable, and detrimental impacts on the community's interest in protecting women's rights.

9. For these reasons, this Court should grant the League's leave to file the *amicus curia* brief.

Dated: May 31, 2024

**WINSTON AND STRAWN LLP**

By: 

Susannah Torpey, Esq.  
200 Park Avenue, Floor 44  
New York, New York 10166  
T: (212) 294-4690  
storpey@winston.com

TO ALL COUNSEL: VIA NYSCEF

*Attorney for Proposed Amici*

# **EXHIBIT A**



**Andrea K. Bailey, County Clerk**  
Livingston County Government Center  
6 Court Street, Room 201  
Geneseo, New York 14454  
(585) 243-7010 ~ Fax (585) 243-7928

## Livingston County Clerk Recording Page

**Received From:**

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Document Desc: **NOTICE OF APPEAL**

**Plaintiff**

Byrnes Marjorie  
*individually and as a member of the New York State Assembly*  
Feeney Tawn  
Lundgren Susan

**Defendant**

SEE DOCUMENT

**Recorded Information:**

Index #: 000778-2023

State of New York  
County of Livingston

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrea K. Bailey".

Livingston County Clerk

*This sheet constitutes the Clerk's endorsement required by section 319 of the Real Property Law of the State of New York*



STATE OF NEW YORK:  
SUPREME COURT: LIVINGSTON COUNTY

MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member  
of the New York State Assemble, TAWN FEENEY and  
SUSAN LUNDGREN,

Index No. 000778/2023

Plaintiffs,

-against-

**NOTICE OF APPEAL**

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro  
Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, ROBERT  
ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate, THE  
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, CARL  
HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly, WILLIAM  
BARCLAY as Minority Leader of the Assembly, and the  
NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS,

Defendants.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the defendants, the New York State Senate, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, as the President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, the New York State Assembly, and Carl Heastie, as Speaker of the New York State Assembly (“Defendants”), hereby appeal to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, from the Judgment (denominated “Decision and Judgment”) of Supreme Court, Livingston County (Doyle, D.), dated May 7, 2024, duly entered in the Office of the Clerk of Livingston County on the same date, *see* NYSCEF Document No. 81, and attached hereto as **Exhibit A**. This appeal is taken from every part of the Judgment.

DATED: Rochester, New York  
May 14, 2024

LETITIA JAMES  
Attorney General of the State of New York  
*Attorney for Defendants*  
By: /s/ Heather L. McKay  
HEATHER L. MCKAY  
Assistant Attorney General  
144 Exchange Blvd, Suite 200  
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To: Roberta A. Flower Cox, Esq.  
Christian P. Brown, Esq.  
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*Attorneys for Plaintiffs*  
Via NYSCEF

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*Attorneys for Robert Ortz as Minority Leader of the Senate  
And William Barclay as Minority Leader of the Assembly*

Kevin G. Murphy  
Brian L. Quail  
*Attorneys for NYS Board of Elections*

# EXHIBIT A



**Andrea K. Bailey, County Clerk**  
Livingston County Government Center  
6 Court Street, Room 201  
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(585) 243-7010 ~ Fax (585) 243-7928

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ROCHESTER, NY 14614

Document Type: **CIVIL ACTION - MISC**

Document Desc: **DECISION + ORDER ON MOTION**

**Plaintiff**

Byrnes Marjorie  
*individually and as a member of the New York State Assembly*  
Feeney Tawn  
Lundgren Susan

**Defendant**

SEE DOCUMENT

**Recorded Information:**

Index #: 000778-2023

State of New York  
County of Livingston

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Livingston County Clerk

*This sheet constitutes the Clerk's endorsement required by section 319 of the Real Property Law of the State of New York*

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
COUNTY OF LIVINGSTON

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MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member  
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SUSAN LUNDGREN,

Plaintiffs,

**Decision and Judgment**

vs.

Index No. 000778-2023

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro  
Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, ROBERT  
ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate, THE  
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, CARL  
HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly, WILLIAM  
BARCLAY as Minority Leader of the Assembly, and the  
NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS,

Defendants.

---

**Appearances:**

Christian Browne, Esq., McLAUGHLIN & STERN, LLP and Bobbie Anne Flower Cox,  
Esq., COX LAWYERS PLLC for the Plaintiffs

Letitia James, New York Attorney General, by Emily Fusco, Esq., and Heather  
McKay, Esq., of counsel, for the New York State Senate, New York State  
Assembly, and the Majority Defendants

Lisa A. Perillo, Esq., Perillo Hill LLP, for the Defendants Robert Ortt, as Minority  
Leader of the Senate, and William Barclay, as Minority Leader of the Assembly

**Daniel J. Doyle, J.,**

This case presents novel issues concerning the New York State Legislature's actions in proposing amendments to the Constitution in derogation of the explicit process outlined in § 1 of Article XIX of the New York Constitution and the ability of citizens to challenge those actions in a plenary proceeding.

On July 1, 2022, the New York State Legislature (hereinafter "Legislature") adopted a Concurrent Resolution which sought to amend the Constitution.<sup>1</sup> On October 30, 2023, Plaintiffs initiated this action seeking declaratory judgment that the Legislature violated § 1 of Article XIX of the New York Constitution in adopting the Concurrent Resolution and an order removing the proposed amendment from the ballot for the general election of November 5, 2024.

Defendants, the Senate of the State of New York, Andrea Stewart-Cousins (as the President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate), the Assembly of the State of New York, and Carl Heastie (as Speaker of the Assembly of the State of New York) (collectively, the "Majority Defendants") moved to dismiss the complaint for failure to state a cause of action (CPLR Rule 3211 [a][7]), lack of subject matter jurisdiction (CPLR Rule 3211[a][2]), lack of capacity to sue (CPLR Rule 3211 [a][3]), and lack of standing (CPLR Rule 3211 [a][5]). As the parties agreed there were no

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<sup>1</sup> The merits of the proposed amendment to the Constitution are not an issue herein.

issues of fact, and upon notice to the parties, the Court converted the motion to a motion for summary judgment.<sup>2</sup> The plaintiffs cross-move for summary judgment on their complaint. Both parties seek a declaration in their favor.<sup>3</sup>

For the reasons that follow, the defendants' summary judgment motion is GRANTED in part, Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Carl Heastie are dismissed as defendants herein and the remaining requested relief is denied. The plaintiffs' summary judgment motion is GRANTED.

### ***Relevant Facts***

On July 1, 2022, both houses of the Legislature introduced concurrent resolutions seeking to amend § 11 of Article I of the Constitution, the "Bill of Rights". In the Senate the resolution was advanced as Senate Bill S. 51002 and in the Assembly as Assembly Bill A. 41002 (hereinafter the "Concurrent Resolution"). Immediately following the introduction of the Concurrent Resolution, it was referred to the Attorney General for her opinion, as required by § 1 of Article XIX of the New York Constitution.

§ 1 of Article XIX of the New York Constitution states (emphasis supplied):

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<sup>2</sup> See Decision and Order of the Hon. Daniel J. Doyle dated March 14, 2024 (NYSCEF Docket # 41).

<sup>3</sup> Defendant New York State Board of Elections filed a "no position" letter with the Court (NYSCEF Docket # 7).

Any amendment or amendments to this constitution may be proposed in the senate and assembly whereupon such amendment or amendments *shall be referred to the attorney-general whose duty it shall be within twenty days thereafter to render an opinion in writing to the senate and assembly as to the effect of such amendment or amendments upon other provisions of the constitution.*<sup>4</sup> Upon receiving such opinion, if the amendment or amendments as proposed or as amended shall be agreed to by a majority of the members elected to each of the two houses, such proposed amendment or amendments shall be entered on their journals, and the ayes and noes taken thereon, and referred to the next regular legislative session convening after the succeeding general election of members of the assembly, and shall be published for three months previous to the time of making such choice; and if in such legislative session, such proposed amendment or amendments shall be agreed to by a majority of all the members elected to each house, then it shall be the duty of the legislature to submit each proposed

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<sup>4</sup> This language was approved during the 1938 Constitutional Convention. At that Convention, the Chairman explained the proposed amendment as follows (emphasis supplied):

Mr. Pitcher: Mr. Chairman, may I move No. 77?

The Secretary: General Order No. 77, Int. No. 694, Pr. No. 837, by the Committee on Future Amendments. Proposed constitutional amendment to amend Article XIV of the Constitution, in relation to future amendments and future constitutional conventions.

The Chairman: If you will permit me, gentlemen, I have not the proposal here, but I can explain it. The only substantial change is that provision on lines 6 to 11 of the proposal, whereby it is provided that when a proposed amendment is submitted to the Legislature, it will immediately be forwarded to the Attorney General for his report as to its effect upon other provisions of the Constitution; **and upon this report coming back within 20 days, then the Legislature will proceed to act upon it as it sees fit.** In other words, it was thought that it would be very helpful to the Legislature if the Attorney-General made a report as to the effect of the language of the proposal on other provisions of the Constitution.

Revised Record of the Constitutional Convention of the State of New York (1938).



amendment or amendments to the people for approval in such manner and at such times as the legislature shall prescribe; and if the people shall approve and ratify such amendment or amendments by a majority of the electors voting thereon, such amendment or amendments shall become a part of the constitution on the first day of January next after such approval. *Neither the failure of the attorney-general to render an opinion concerning such a proposed amendment nor his or her failure to do so timely shall affect th[e] validity of such proposed amendment or legislative action thereon.*<sup>5</sup>

The same day the Concurrent Resolution was forwarded to the Attorney General (July 1<sup>st</sup>), both the Senate and the Assembly voted to adopt the Concurrent Resolution. At the time of their vote, neither the Senate nor the Assembly had received the opinion from the Attorney General.

The Attorney General issued her opinion on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and it was received by the Legislature on July 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Legislature referred the proposed amendment to the next session of the Legislature, and on January 24, 2023, both houses adopted the second concurrent resolution. The proposed amendment is scheduled to appear on the ballot to be voted on by the electorate on November 5, 2024.

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<sup>5</sup> This language was approved by the electorate in November of 1941. Neither party has provided any relevant, contemporaneous information – such as legislative memorandums or floor debate – as to the intent of the Legislature in proposing this language.

***The Constitution Prevents the Legislature from Acting on a Proposed Amendment until either Receiving the Attorney General's Opinion or Twenty Days has Passed Since Referral to the Attorney General***

In assessing the language of § 1 of Article XIX to the Constitution and giving it its ordinary meaning, and ensuring that the entire Article is read to avoid a construction that treats a word or phrase as superfluous,<sup>6</sup> the Court concludes that it was the intent of the People to: (1) ensure that the legislators voting on a proposed constitutional amendment received the benefit of the Attorney General's opinion on its impact on other provisions in the Constitution; (2) require that the Attorney General provide the requested opinion within twenty (20) days; (3) prohibit the Legislature from acting until it received the opinion or the twenty day period had

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<sup>6</sup> “We have long and repeatedly held that “in construing the language of the Constitution as in construing the language of a statute, the courts should look for the intention of the People and give to the language used its ordinary meaning” (*Sherrill*, 188 N.Y. at 207, 81 N.E. 124). The “ ‘starting point for discerning legislative intent is the language of the statute itself ” (*Matter of Lynch v. City of New York*, 40 N.Y.3d 7, 13, 192 N.Y.S.3d 50, 213 N.E.3d 110 [2023], quoting *Matter of DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Spitzer*, 7 N.Y.3d 653, 660, 827 N.Y.S.2d 88, 860 N.E.2d 705 [2006]), such that the “ ‘literal language of a statute controls’ ” (*Lynch*, 40 N.Y.3d at 13, 192 N.Y.S.3d 50, 213 N.E.3d 110, quoting *Matter of Anonymous v. Molik*, 32 N.Y.3d 30, 37, 84 N.Y.S.3d 414, 109 N.E.3d 563 [2018]). All parts of the constitutional provision or statute “ ‘must be harmonized with each other as well as with the general intent of the whole statute, and effect and meaning must, if possible, be given to the entire statute and every part and word thereof ” (*People v. Pabon*, 28 N.Y.3d 147, 152, 42 N.Y.S.3d 659, 65 N.E.3d 688 [2016], quoting *McKinney's Cons. Laws of N.Y.*, Book 1, Statutes § 98[a]). Indeed, our well-settled doctrine requires us to give effect to each component of the provision or statute to avoid “ ‘a construction that treats a word or phrase as superfluous’ ” (*Columbia Mem. Hosp. v. Hinds*, 38 N.Y.3d 253, 271, 172 N.Y.S.3d 649, 192 N.E.3d 1128 [2022], quoting *Matter of Lemma v. Nassau County Police Officer Indem. Bd.*, 31 N.Y.3d 523, 528, 80 N.Y.S.3d 669, 105 N.E.3d 1250 [2018]).” (*Hoffmann v. New York State Indep. Redistricting Comm'n*, \_\_ NY3d \_\_; No. 90, 2023 WL 8590407, at \*7 [Dec. 12, 2023].)

expired, and (4) authorize the Legislature to act on the proposed amendment after twenty days had passed, even if the Attorney General failed to issue the opinion, or did so after the twenty day period (and the Legislature having already acted).

“In construing the language of the Constitution[,] as in construing the language of a statute, the courts ... give to the language used its ordinary meaning” (*Matter of Carey v. Morton*, 297 N.Y. 361, 366, 79 N.E.2d 442 [1948], citing *Matter of Sherrill v. O'Brien*, 188 N.Y. 185, 207, 81 N.E. 124 [1907]).” (*Burton v. New York State Dep't of Tax'n & Fin.*, 25 NY3d 732, 739 [2015].) “In the construction of constitutional provisions, the language used, if plain and precise, should be given its full effect” and “[i]t must be presumed that its framers understood the force of the language used and, as well, the people who adopted it” (*People v. Rathbone*, 145 N.Y. 434, 438, 40 N.E. 395 [1895]). Our Constitution is “an instrument framed deliberately and with care, and adopted by the people as the organic law of the State” and, when interpreting it, we may “not allow for interstitial and interpretative gloss ... by the other [b]ranches [of the government] that substantially alters the specified law-making regimen” set forth in the Constitution (*Matter of King v. Cuomo*, 81 N.Y.2d 247, 253, 597 N.Y.S.2d 918, 613 N.E.2d 950 [1993]).” (*Harkenrider v. Hochul*, 38 NY3d 494 [2022].)

The plain language of Article XIX begins with “the amendment or amendments shall be referred to the attorney-general whose duty it shall be within twenty days thereafter to render an opinion in writing to the senate and assembly as to the effect of such amendment or amendments upon other provisions of the constitution.” As explained in the Revised Record of the Constitutional Convention of the State of New York (1938), this language was inserted into the Article as it was believed it would be “very helpful” to the Legislature to obtain the Attorney’s General’s opinion on the proposed amendment. The language imposes a duty upon the Attorney General to provide the opinion in twenty days.

“Upon receiving such opinion,” the Legislature may thereafter vote on the proposed amendment. This language compels the conclusion that the People intended for the Legislature to wait to receive the Attorney General opinion prior to voting on the proposed amendment. This is the only reasonable interpretation and is supported by the characterization provided by the Chairman of the 1938 Constitutional Convention when he stated: “upon this report coming back within 20 days, **then the Legislature will proceed to act upon it** as it sees fit” (emphasis supplied).

The Majority Defendants, however, refer to the language added by amendment in 1941 to argue that regardless of the language outlined above, the

Legislature need not wait the required 20 days and can act on the proposed amendment prior to receiving an opinion from the Attorney General. The Court declines to adopt their interpretation.

In 1941 Article XIX was amended to add the following: “[n]either the failure of the attorney-general to render an opinion concerning such a proposed amendment nor his or her failure to do so timely shall affect th[e] validity of such proposed amendment or legislative action thereon.” Although the parties do not provide any contemporaneous legislative memorandums or statements by other officials that elucidate why this amendment was proposed by the Legislature, the most reasonable inference is that it was to prevent a “pocket veto” by the Attorney General of the proposed amendment. Thus, the language addresses two possibilities of non-compliance by the Attorney General: (1) the Attorney General refuses to submit an opinion, and (2) the Attorney General delays providing the opinion beyond the twenty (20) day limit.

The first clause (“[n]either the failure of the attorney-general to render an opinion concerning such a proposed amendment”) prevents the Attorney General from thwarting the passage of the proposed amendment by refusing to follow his or her duty in providing the opinion. The second clause (“nor his or her failure to do so **timely** shall affect th[e] validity of such proposed amendment or legislative

action thereon” [emphasis supplied]) allows the Legislature to proceed with the vote on the proposed amendment after the period of twenty (20) days has expired. The use of the word “timely” as a modifier to the word “failure” compels the conclusion that the language refers to the duty to provide the opinion within twenty days, and the issuance of the opinion after that period does not require invalidation of legislative action taken after the period had expired but prior to the receipt of the opinion.

The Majority Defendants argue that this language requires the conclusion that the Legislature is free to act on the proposed amendment at any time- even prior to the expiration of the twenty-day period as occurred here - regardless of whether the Attorney General provides an opinion.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation, however, would require the Court to ignore the plain language of the Article and would render meaningless the intent of the People (to aid the deliberative process). It would also require the Court to conclude that the language “whose duty it shall be within

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<sup>7</sup> The Court agrees with the Majority Defendants’ position that the issuance of the Attorney General opinion contemplated by Article XIX is not a condition precedent that must be satisfied prior to the Legislature acting upon the proposed amendment. The Legislature is free to act after the opinion is received or the twenty-day period has expired. However, the intent of the People in delineating the procedure outlined in the Article is to provide to the Legislature relevant information (deemed “very helpful” by the drafters) to assist them in their deliberative process. Article XIX compels the Attorney General to act in issuing the opinion, and compels the Legislature to wait for that opinion, unless the Attorney General disregards his or her duty to provide the opinion within twenty days. Only then is the Legislature free to act.

twenty days thereafter to render an opinion” and “upon receiving such opinion” is superfluous. In essence, the Majority Defendants argue for an interpretation that would render the Attorney General’s duty to submit an opinion meaningless as the Legislature could act on the proposed amendment at any time, as they did here.<sup>8</sup>

In adopting the 1941 amendment, the People did not remove the phrase “[u]pon receiving such opinion.” To harmonize that phrase with the language added by the 1941 amendment the Court must conclude that the intent of the People expressed in Article XIX is to provide the Legislature the authority to act on the proposed amendment only after the Attorney General has provided the opinion or failed in his or her duty to provide the required opinion with the twenty-day period. “When language of a constitutional provision is plain and unambiguous, full effect should be given to “the intention of the framers \* \* \* as indicated by the language employed” and approved by the People (*Settle v. Van Evrea*, 49 N.Y. 280, 281 [1872]; *see also, People v. Rathbone*, 145 N.Y. 434, 438, 40 N.E. 395).” (*King v. Cuomo*, 81 NY2d 247, 253 [1993].)

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<sup>8</sup> It is true that the Legislature is free to act upon the proposed amendment regardless of what is contained in the Attorney General’s opinion. But that fact is irrelevant. The People’s intent under Article XIX is to aid in the deliberative process by requiring the Legislature to consider information provided by the Executive Branch as it considers adopting a proposed amendment, not to provide the Executive Branch the power to prevent it from acting.

The Majority Defendants argue that their position is supported by historical precedents and the fact that the Governor has the authority to call the Legislature into “extraordinary” session at which a proposed amendment may be voted. The Court finds those arguments unavailing.

First, the historical precedent of how the Legislature has proposed amendments after the 1941 amendment to Article XIX – if contrary to the intent of the People as defined by the plain language of the Constitution – is irrelevant. (*King v. Cuomo, supra.*) Second, the Governor’s authority to call the Legislature into extraordinary session does not obviate the intent of the People (as expressed in Article XIX) that amendments to the Constitution be pursued by the Legislature in a deliberative manner and with the input of Attorney General. Notably, the Attorney General is not required to wait twenty days to provide his or her opinion. Presumably, should the need to seek an expeditious amendment to the Constitution exist (a dubious proposition), the Attorney General would provide his or her opinion with equal alacrity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Additionally, it is clearly the intent of the People not to allow amendment to the Constitution except by an informed, deliberative process. The procedure requires not one vote of the Legislature, but two votes, with the second vote occurring after the next election for members of the assembly (“ . . . and referred to the next regular legislative session convening after the succeeding general election of members of the assembly”). The entire process is designed to take many months, and two informed votes of two Legislatures, and a vote by the electorate. Nothing about the process is “expedient”. “There is little room for misapprehension as to the ends to be achieved by the safeguards surrounding the process



Finally, the Majority Defendants cite to a 1961 Opinion of the Attorney General as support for their position. However, a close examination of that opinion establishes that it does not support the Majority Defendants' position. In that opinion the Attorney General wrote (emphasis added):

. . . In my opinion the validity of an amendment is not affected by the absence of the Attorney General's opinion thereon, whether due to his failure of otherwise.

**Since the Legislature may recall a concurrent resolution** if in the Attorney General's opinion, the proposed Amendment will affect some other provision of the Constitution, the purpose of the opinion would not be frustrated by the Legislature's acting upon the proposal prior to the receipt of the opinion.

The Attorney General based his opinion upon the fact that at the time the 1961 opinion was issued, the Legislature had the presumed authority to recall a bill it had passed. However, the ability of the Legislature to recall bills was curtailed by *King v. Cuomo, supra*. "In *King*, the Presentment Clause of the New York Constitution (art IV, § 7) was held violated by the bicameral practice of "recalling" or "reacquiring" passed bills after presentment to the Governor, but prior to gubernatorial action on the bill. *King* concluded that the Legislature's practice "undermine[d] the integrity of the law-making process as well as the underlying

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of amendment. The integrity of the basic law is to be preserved against hasty or ill-considered changes, the fruit of ignorance or passion." (*Browne v. City of New York*, 241 NY 96, 109 [1925].)

rationale for the demarcation of authority and power in this process” (*id.*, at 255, 597 N.Y.S.2d 918, 613 N.E.2d 950).” (*Campaign For Fiscal Equity, Inc. v. Marino*, 87 NY2d 235, 239 [1995].)

Although *King v. Cuomo, supra*, concerned bills passed by both houses and sent to the Governor, the procedure outlined in Article XIX does not contemplate a “recall” procedure and instead mandates that upon approval the proposed amendment must be referred “to the next regular legislative session. . .”<sup>10</sup> Thus, referral to the next legislature is mandated by the clear words of the Constitution. Upon such referral, the legislature no longer has the authority to “recall” the bill. As the Court of Appeals noted in *King v. Cuomo, supra*:

The putative authority of the Legislature to recall a passed bill once it has been formally transmitted to the Governor “is not found in the constitution” (*People v. Devlin*, 33 N.Y. 269, 277). We conclude, therefore, that the practice is not allowed under the Constitution. To permit the Legislature to use its general rule-making powers, pertaining to in-house procedures, to create this substantive authority is untenable. As this Court stated in *Devlin* “[w]hen both houses have \* \* finally passed a bill, and sent it to the governor, *they have exhausted their powers upon it*” (*id.*, at 277 [emphasis added]).”

(*King v. Cuomo*, 81 NY2d at 252–53.)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “. . . shall be agreed to by a majority of the members elected to each of the two houses, such proposed amendment or amendments **shall** be entered on their journals, and the yeas and noes taken thereon, **and referred to the next regular legislative session . . .**” (§ 1 of Article XIX, emphasis supplied.)

<sup>11</sup> See also *Campaign For Fiscal Equity, Inc. v. Marino*, 87 NY2d 235, 238–39 (1995): “We hold that the practice of withholding from the Governor those bills on which both houses of the

Since the Legislature cannot “recall” a concurrent resolution it has passed,<sup>12</sup> the 1961 Attorney General Opinion is no longer supportive of the Majority Defendants’ position. In fact, considering the holding of *King* and its progeny- and the language of Article XIX requiring referral of the proposed amendment to the next legislative session - the 1961 Attorney General opinion supports the plaintiffs’ position in that the purpose of seeking the opinion of the Attorney General prior to voting on the proposed amendment “would [] be frustrated by the Legislature’s acting upon the proposal prior to the receipt of the opinion.”<sup>13</sup>

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Legislature have formally acted is violative of article IV, § 7. To hold otherwise would be to sanction a practice where one house or one or two persons, as leaders of the Legislature, could nullify the express vote and will of the People’s representatives. This requirement is constitutionally required and would not interfere with the usual and appropriate interaction of the executive and legislative branches in the making of laws.”

<sup>12</sup> The Majority Defendants rely upon a treatise on the New York Constitution that states “[t]he legislature can also recall a proposed amendment by concurrent resolution if the attorney general finds it is inconsistent with other parts of the constitution”. (Peter J. Galie & Christopher Bopst, *The New York State Constitution* 350 [2d ed 2012].) However, there is no constitutional language cited, statutory citation, or caselaw citation supporting this assertion and it appears it may be based upon the 1961 Attorney General Opinion.

<sup>13</sup> Additional language in the opinion supports the plaintiffs’ position that the opinion of the Attorney General is important to the deliberative process undertaken by the Legislature in considering proposed amendments to the Constitution. Earlier in the opinion the Attorney General noted that the “obvious purpose is to preserve the integrity of the Constitution and to guard against inconsistencies that might result from its amendment.” The Attorney General also noted that “[b]eyond peradventure the Legislature may act upon a proposed amendment after the expiration of the twenty day period without the opinion of the Attorney General perforce of the 1941 amendment.” However, the Attorney General’s opinion that it was permissible for the Legislature to act prior to the expiration of the prior to the receipt of the opinion within the twenty-day period, as noted above, is predicated upon the belief - now invalidated - that the Legislature could recall the concurrent resolution approving of the amendment. (1939 Atty. Gen. 358.)

### *The Plaintiff's Claims are Justiciable*

The Majority Defendants argue that the plaintiffs' cause of action is not justiciable, arguing that: (1) the separation of powers bars judicial review of the Legislature's procedures for adopting the proposed amendment, (2) the issue is not "ripe" for review as the amendment has not been voted on by the electorate, and (3) that the plaintiffs do not have standing. Each argument will be addressed *seriatim*.

### The Courts have Authority to Review Unconstitutional Acts of the Legislature

The Majority Defendants argue that this Court cannot intrude upon the internal practices and procedures of the Legislature to review its compliance with Article XIX of the Constitution. The Court rejects this argument.

The procedures utilized by the Legislature in proposing amendments to the Constitution are set forth not in internal rules and procedures of the Legislature, but in Article XIX of the Constitution. "Our precedents are firm that the "courts will always be available to resolve disputes concerning the scope of that authority which is granted by the Constitution to the other two branches of the government" (*Saxton v. Carey*, 44 N.Y.2d 545, 551, 406 N.Y.S.2d 732, 378 N.E.2d 95; *New York State Bankers Assn. v. Wetzler*, 81 N.Y.2d 98, 102, 595 N.Y.S.2d 936, 612 N.E.2d 294; *see also, Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52, 116, 47 S.Ct. 21, 25, 71 L.Ed. 160; *Matter of New York State*

*Inspection, Sec. & Law Enforcement Empls. v. Cuomo*, 64 N.Y.2d 233, 239, 485 N.Y.S.2d 719, 475 N.E.2d 90).” (*King v. Cuomo*, 81 NY2d at 251.)

Courts have the authority to review actions taken by the Legislature to ensure compliance with the Constitution, even if those acts are fairly characterized as “internal rules”- which is not the case herein. “We conclude that the courts do not trespass “into the wholly internal affairs of the Legislature” (*Heimbach v. State of New York*, 59 N.Y.2d 891, 893, 465 N.Y.S.2d 936, 452 N.E.2d 1264, *appeal dismissed* 464 U.S. 956, 104 S.Ct. 386, 78 L.Ed.2d 331) when they review and enforce a clear and unambiguous constitutional regimen of this nature.” (*Id.*)

As the plaintiffs’ cause of action concerns whether the Legislature complied with Article XIX in proposing the amendment to the Constitution, this Court has authority to resolve the issues herein.

#### The Issue Herein is Ripe for Review

The Majority Defendants also argue that the plaintiffs’ claims are not ripe for review, as the electorate may not approve the amendment at the general election on November 5, 2024.

Important to the resolution of this issue is the fact that the plaintiffs’ claims do not challenge the substance of the proposed amendment. Plaintiffs do not seek to invalidate the proposed amendment arguing that – should it pass - it violates

other constitutional provisions (“facial attack” on its constitutionality) or is unconstitutional as applied to them (an “as applied” challenge), and thus plaintiff *will* be harmed *if* the voters approve of the amendment. Had the plaintiffs made those claims, those claims would not be ripe for review. (See *e.g.*, *New York Pub. Int. Rsch. Grp., Inc. v. Carey*, 42 NY2d 527 [1977].)

Plaintiffs contend instead that the amendment process employed by the Legislature to propose the amendment was unconstitutional as it violated Article XIX of the Constitution. Plaintiffs’ claim became “ripe” once the Legislature acted in violation of Article XIX and approved the Concurrent Resolution and thereafter placed the proposed amendment on the ballot. (See *New York State Bankers Ass’n, Inc. v. Wetzler*, 81 NY2d 98 [1993].)

As noted by the Court of Appeals in *New York Pub. Int. Rsch. Grp., Inc. v. Carey* (42 NY2d 527 [1977]):

That is not to say that the courts may never consider the validity of proposed legislation. This has been done on several occasions, although with reluctance and then only incidentally to resolve a dispute as to whether the proposition should be placed or remain on the ballot (see, *e.g.*, *Matter of McCabe v Voorhis*, *supra*; *Matter of Tierney v Cohen*, 268 NY 464; *Matter of Osborn v Cohen*, 272 NY 55; *Matter of Mooney v Cohen*, 272 NY 33; *Johnson v Etkin*, 279 NY 1; *Matter of Stroughton v Cohen*, 281 NY 343; *Matter of Atwood v Cohen*, 291 NY 484).

These are not advisory opinions. The effect of the court's determination in those cases does not depend on the outcome of the election. On the

contrary, those orders have the immediate and practical effect of determining whether the proposition should be submitted to the voters, or whether all the expense and human effort involved in the election process would be wasted because of fatal defects in the law.

(*Id.* at 531-532. *See also Fossella v. Dinkins*, 66 NY2d 162 [1985].)

Plaintiffs claim is that the proposed amendment was passed by the Legislature in derogation of Article XIX of the Constitution and should therefore be removed from the ballot. “Where, as here, the relief requested is the preclusion from the ballot of a proposal sought to be placed before the voters, the proceeding is not rendered premature by the fact that unless approved the challenged law would not become effective, for the requested relief is not dependent upon the result of the election and would instead have an immediate effect.” (*Cantrell v. Hayduk*, 45 NY2d 925, 926, [1978].)

#### Plaintiffs Have Standing to Challenge the Adoption of the Concurrent Resolution

The Majority Defendants argue that citizens do not have standing to challenge unconstitutional acts of the Legislature, and Plaintiff Marjorie Byrnes, as a Member of the Assembly, also lacks standing. The Court disagrees.

Plaintiffs claim the Legislature violated Article XIX of the Constitution in passing the Concurrent Resolution without following the requisite procedures outlined in that Article. The issue of the correct constitutional interpretation of

Article XIX, and whether the Legislature violated same in proposing the amendment herein, are issues of public significance, but there is likely no member of the general public that can allege a specific harm to satisfy common-law standing principles.<sup>14</sup>

However, there is an exception to traditional standing principles applicable herein. As the Court of Appeals noted in *Saratoga Cnty. Chamber of Com., Inc. v. Pataki* (100 NY2d 801 [2003]):

It follows that our doctrines governing standing must be sensitive to claims of institutional harm. Actions of this type can serve as a means for citizens to ensure the continued vitality of the constraints on power that lie at the heart of our constitutional scheme (*cf. Matter of Dairylea Coop. v Walkley*, 38 NY2d 6, 10 [1975]; *Committee for an Effective Judiciary v State*, 209 Mont 105, 112-113, 679 P2d 1223, 1227 [1984]; *State ex rel. Howard v Oklahoma Corp. Commn.*, 614 P2d 45, 52 [Okla 1980]). Thus, where a denial of standing would pose “in effect ... an impenetrable barrier to any judicial scrutiny of legislative action,” our

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<sup>14</sup> When questioned during oral argument on their summary judgment motion, able counsel for the Majority Defendants believed that the Attorney General would have standing, but no other person would until the amendment was approved and “as-applied” or “facial challenges” could then be brought. As to the claim that the Attorney General has standing, as noted by the Court of Appeals in *Boryszewski v. Brydges* (37 NY2d 361 [1975]):

Moreover, it may even properly be thought that the responsibility of the Attorney-General and of other State officials is to uphold and effectively to support action taken by the legislative and executive branches of government. As Judge Fuld wrote generally in *St. Clair* (*supra*, 13 N.Y.2d p. 79, 242 N.Y.S.2d p. 47, 192 N.E.2d p. 19) “The suggestion \* \* \* that the Attorney-General and other state officials may be relied upon to attack the constitutional validity of state legislation is both unreal in fact and dubious in theory’. His estimate of the situation has been verified in the years since *St. Clair*.

(*Id.* at 364.)



duty is to open rather than close the door to the courthouse (*see Boryszewski*, 37 NY2d at 364; *see also State ex rel. Clark v Johnson*, 120 NM 562, 904 P2d 11 [1995]; *Rios v Symington*, 172 Ariz 3, 833 P2d 20 [1992]; *State ex rel. Sego v Kirkpatrick*, 86 NM 359, 363, 524 P2d 975, 979 [1974]).

(*Id.* at 814.)<sup>15</sup>

Should this Court not grant plaintiffs standing, it is likely that the actions of the Legislature in proceeding contrary to the requirements of Article XIX would be insulated from judicial review. As noted above, the procedures outlined in Article XIX express the intent of the People that the Legislature receive input from the Attorney General on the impact of the proposed amendment on the Constitution's provisions, thus improving the deliberative process. Accordingly, this Court concludes that plaintiffs, as citizens, have standing to address the claim herein that the Legislature's passing of the Concurrent Resolution was in contravention to the

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<sup>15</sup> *See also Boryszewski v. Brydges*, 37 N.Y.2d 361, 364 [1975]:

Where the prospect of challenge to the constitutionality of State legislation is otherwise effectually remote, it would be particularly repellant today, when every encouragement to the individual citizen taxpayer is to take an active, aggressive interest in his State as well as his local and national government, to continue to exclude him from access to the judicial process—since *Marbury v. Madison*, 1 Cranch (5 U.S.) 137, 2 L.Ed. 60, the classical means for effective scrutiny of legislative and executive action. The role of the judiciary is integral to the doctrine of separation of powers. It is unacceptable now by any process of continued quarantine to exclude the very persons most likely to invoke its powers.

procedures required by Article XIX. (*Saratoga Cnty. Chamber of Com., Inc. v. Pataki, supra.*)

The Court also concludes that Plaintiff Marjorie Byrnes, as a Member of the Assembly, has standing in her capacity of a member of the New York State Legislature. The harm alleged here - failure of the Legislature to follow the mandates of Article XIX of the Constitution - deprived Assemblymember Byrnes of the opinion of the Attorney General and necessarily impacted her obligations as a member of the Legislature voting on a resolution seeking to amend the constitution. The Court determines this is sufficient to confer standing. (*See gen. Soc'y of Plastics Indus., Inc. v. Cnty. of Suffolk*, 77 NY2d 761 [1991]; *see also Sullivan v. Siebert*, 70 AD2d 975 [3<sup>rd</sup> Dept. 1979]: “However, the challenge to the standing of petitioner [Assemblymember] Sullivan to pursue the relief sought must fail. Section 164 of the Executive Law provides that annual reports are to be made to the Governor and the Legislature. As a member of the Legislature, Sullivan has a statutory right to receive copies of the reports. This right confers standing upon Sullivan to pursue this action.”)

***This Action is Properly a Plenary Action and Not a Special Proceeding***

The Majority Defendants argue that as the plaintiffs are challenging the procedures used by the Legislature in the adoption of the proposed amendment,

this action is properly maintained as an Article 78 proceeding and thus subject to a four month statute of limitations.

Regardless of how the instant action was initiated, this Court must determine “the true nature of the case” to determine the appropriate statute of limitations period. “In making such a determination, where the nature of an action is at issue, it is necessary to ““examine the substance of [the] action to identify the relationship out of which the claim arises and the relief sought” (citations omitted). If the court determines that the parties' dispute can be, or could have been, resolved through a form of action or proceeding for which a specific limitation period is statutorily provided, that limitation period governs (citations omitted).” (*Dandomar Co., LLC v. Town of Pleasant Valley Town Bd.*, 86 AD3d 83, 90–91 [2<sup>nd</sup> Dept. 2011]; see also *Foley v. Masiello*, 38 AD3d 1201 [4<sup>th</sup> Dept. 2007].)

As the parties dispute the operative effect of the language employed in Article XIX of the Constitution, the essence of this case is one of constitutional interpretation- not whether clearly defined procedures were properly followed. (See e.g., *P & N Tiffany Properties, Inc. v. Vill. of Tuckahoe*, 33 AD3d 61 [2<sup>nd</sup> Dept. 2006].) Challenging the validity of a legislative act is properly a declaratory judgment action. (See *Rochester Police Locust Club, Inc. v. City of Rochester*, 196 AD3d 74, 77 [4<sup>th</sup> Dept. 2021], *aff'd*, 41 NY3d 156 [2023]): “The gravamen of plaintiffs' lawsuit is that Local Law

No. 2 is invalid in certain key aspects, and “it is well established that an article 78 proceeding is not the proper vehicle to test the validity of a legislative enactment” (*Kamhi v Town of Yorktown*, 141 AD2d 607, 608 [2d Dept 1988], *affd* 74 NY2d 423 [1989]).” See also *Parker v. Town of Alexandria*, 138 AD3d 1467 [4<sup>th</sup> Dept. 2016]; *Foley v. Masiello*, *supra*.)

Furthermore, “[] where the substance of the law, “its wisdom and merit” (*Matter of Voelckers v Guelli*, 58 NY2d 170, 177 [1983]), **or its constitutionality**, is challenged, then the proper procedure is to commence an action for a declaratory judgment (see *New York City Health & Hosps. Corp. v McBarnette*, 84 NY2d 194 [1994]; *P & N Tiffany Props., Inc. v Village of Tuckahoe*, 33 AD3d 61, 64 [2006]).” (*Highland Hall Apartments, LLC v. New York State Div. of Hous. & Cmty. Renewal*, 66 AD3d 678, 681 [2<sup>nd</sup> Dept. 2009], [emphasis supplied].) Here, the parties are disputing the meaning of the language of Article XIX and what duties it imposes both upon the Attorney General and the Legislature. As the parties are urging different constitutional interpretations of the provisions contained in Article XIX, and thus disputing whether the passage of the Concurrent Resolution was constitutional, a declaratory judgment action is appropriate.

### ***Laches does not Bar this Action***

The Majority Defendants argue that the plaintiffs' delay in initiating this action requires the Court to dismiss under the doctrine of laches.<sup>16</sup>

“We have defined laches as an equitable bar, based on a lengthy neglect or omission to assert a right and the resulting prejudice to an adverse party (*see Matter of Barabash*, 31 NY2d 76, 81 [1972]; *see also Matter of Dreikausen v Zoning Bd. of Appeals*, 98 NY2d 165, 173 n 4 [2002]). The mere lapse of time, without a showing of prejudice, will not sustain a defense of laches (*see Galyn v Schwartz*, 56 NY2d 969, 972 [1982]; *Sorrentino v Mierzwa*, 25 NY2d 59 [1969]; *Skrodelis v Norbergs*, 272 AD2d 316 [2d Dept 2000]). The defense has been applied in equitable actions and declaratory judgment actions (both of which are governed by the six-year catchall provision of CPLR 213 [1]) where the defendant shows prejudicial delay even though the limitations period was met. [FN omitted].” (*Saratoga Cnty. Chamber of Com., Inc. v. Pataki*, 100 NY2d at 816.)

The Majority Defendants fail to allege sufficient prejudice. In alleging prejudice, the Majority Defendants argue that the proposed amendment is scheduled to be voted upon at the general election in November of 2024 and

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<sup>16</sup> The Majority Defendants argue that the delay is either sixteen months (from initial passage of the Concurrent Resolution in July of 2022) or nine months (from the second passage of the Concurrent Resolution in January of 2023).

“forc[ing] the entire process to start anew” would be prejudicial. They also argue that a declaration in favor of the plaintiffs would deprive the voters of the ability to vote on the amendment. This does not constitute sufficient prejudice to warrant invocation of laches.

Unlike challenges brought under election law proceedings where the delay in initiating the action may deprive voters of their right to vote (*see e.g., Amedure v. State*, 210 AD3d 1134 [3<sup>rd</sup> Dept. 2022]) or impose insurmountable burdens on Defendant New York Board of Elections to oversee an efficient election process (*see e.g., League of Women Voters of New York State v. New York State Bd. of Elections*, 206 AD3d 1227 [3<sup>rd</sup> Dept. 2022], *leave to appeal denied*, 38 NY3d 909 [2022], *reargument denied*, 38 NY3d 1120 [2022]), the delay here did not result in any prejudice to the Legislature. The Legislature may follow the proper procedures mandated by Article XIX and place the proposed amendment on the ballot on a future date.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the voters have no right to vote on an amendment placed

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<sup>17</sup> To the extent the Majority Defendants argue that the plaintiffs’ delay impermissibly prejudiced the Legislature from placing the proposed amendment on the ballot for the 2024 general election, this argument must fail. Had the plaintiffs initiated this action after the Concurrent Resolution first passed, assuming it was “ripe” (in July of 2022), invalidation of that Legislative action would have necessitated the process begin anew and it is not clear that the instant action would have been resolved in time to allow the Legislature to vote again on the Concurrent Resolution prior to the general election in November of 2022. The Majority Defendants have not met their burden in showing that they were prejudiced from placing the proposed amendment on the 2024 general election ballot, or that the failure for it to appear on that ballot constitutes sufficient prejudice to invoke the laches doctrine.

on the ballot in derogation of the procedures required by Constitution. (*See e.g., Town of Cortlandt v. Vill. of Peekskill*, 281 NY 490 [1939].)

***Defendants Stewart-Cousins and Heastie are Dismissed from Suit***

Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Carl Heastie move to dismiss the action as to them arguing that legislative immunity prevents suit for legislative actions taken by them. The Court agrees.

As observed by the Court of Appeals in *People v. Ohrenstein* (77 NY2d 38 [1990]):

The State Constitution provides: “For any speech or debate in either house of the legislature, the members shall not be questioned in any other place” (N.Y. Const., art. III, § 11). We have not previously considered the scope of the immunity granted by this section, but it appears that it was intended to provide at least as much protection as the immunity granted by the comparable provision of the Federal Constitution (New York State Constitutional Convention Committee, *Problems Relating to Legislative Organization and Powers*, at 57 [1938]). The Supreme Court has held that the Speech or Debate Clause confers immunity on members of Congress for legislative acts but does not extend to everything a legislator does which is somehow related to his role even though the act is lawful and generally expected of a legislator (*Hutchinson v. Proxmire, supra*).

Legislative acts have been defined as those which are an integral part of the legislative process, and have been held to include votes and speeches on the floor of the House as well as the underlying motivations for these activities (*Hutchinson v. Proxmire, supra; United States v. Johnson*, 383 U.S. 169, 86 S.Ct. 749, 15 L.Ed.2d 681; *United States v. Brewster*, 408 U.S. 501, 92 S.Ct. 2531, 33 L.Ed.2d 507).

(*Id.* at 53-54.)

“The fundamental purpose of the clause is to insure that the legislative function may be performed independently (*Eastland v. United States Servicemen's Fund*, 421 U.S. 491, 502, 95 S.Ct. 1813, 1820–21, 44 L.Ed.2d 324; *Gravel v. United States*, 408 U.S. 606, 618, 92 S.Ct. 2614, 2623–24, 33 L.Ed.2d 583). The US Supreme Court has interpreted the Federal Speech or Debate Clause broadly to effectuate its purposes, holding that any acts by members of Congress or their aides within the performance of their legislative functions are beyond judicial scrutiny (*see, Gravel v. United States, supra*, at 616, 624–625, 92 S.Ct. at 2622–2633, 2626–2627). The clause not only shields legislators from the consequences of litigation, but also protects them from the burden of defending themselves in court (*see, Powell v. McCormack*, 395 U.S. 486, 502–503, 89 S.Ct. 1944, 1953–54, 23 L.Ed.2d 491; *Dombrowski v. Eastland*, 387 U.S. 82, 85, 87 S.Ct. 1425, 1427–28, 18 L.Ed.2d 577).” (*Straniere v. Silver*, 218 AD2d 80, 83 [3<sup>rd</sup> Dept. 1996].)

Here, Stewart-Cousins and Heastie – to the extent they are sued as representatives for the Senate and Assembly, respectively, are immune from suit and must be dismissed from this action.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Plaintiffs did not oppose this requested relief. “We note at the outset that plaintiff has abandoned the wrongful death cause of action, inasmuch as she failed to oppose that part of defendants’ motion with respect to it and, indeed, has not addressed it on appeal (*see Ciesinski v Town of Aurora*, 202 AD2d 984 [1994]).” (*Donna Prince L. v. Waters*, 48 AD3d 1137, 1138 [4<sup>th</sup> Dept. 2008].)



### *The Appropriate Relief*

As the Court finds that the Legislature violated the procedure required by Article XIX, the appropriate remedy is declaring the Concurrent Resolution adopted in derogation of the constitutional procedures void and removing the proposed amendment from the ballot.

The Court declines to adopt the arguments advanced by the Majority Defendants that the Legislature “substantially complied” with requirements of Article XIX, or to apply the “harmless error doctrine”, or that the relief herein should be limited to the Court determining that Article XIX was violated but refusing to remove the proposed amendment from the ballot. The Constitution is the supreme will of the People. Its amendment should be undertaken by strict adherence to the will of the People as expressed in Article XIX. “Substantial” compliance is not compliance, and this Court cannot condone actions taken by the Legislature in derogation of the expressed will of the People. The Legislature’s vote on the Concurrent Resolution prior to receiving the opinion of the Attorney General frustrated the deliberative process intended by the People in § 1 of Article XIX.

Nor does the Court accept the Majority Defendants’ argument that finding in favor of the plaintiffs imperils other amendments passed by the Legislature under the flawed procedures it previously employed. Those amendments are not subject

to challenge here, and the defense of laches would likely invalidate challenges to amendments already adopted by the People.

Based upon the foregoing, the oral argument conducted on April 16, 2024, and the papers submitted herein,<sup>19</sup> it is hereby

ORDERED that the Majority Defendants' motion for summary judgment in GRANTED, in part, and Defendants Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Carl Heastie are dismissed from suit, and the motion is otherwise is DENIED; and it is further

ORDERED that the plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment is GRANTED; and it is further


ORDERED, ADJUDGED and DECREED that that the New York State Legislature violated §1 of Article XIX of the Constitution in adopting the Concurrent Resolution, and the Concurrent Resolution is declared null and void, and the proposed amendment shall be removed from the ballot for the general election of November 5, 2024.

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<sup>19</sup> Summons and Complaint, with exhibits (NYSCEF Docket #s 1-4); Notice of Motion (NYSCEF Docket # 10); Affirmation in Support with exhibits (NYSCEF Docket #s 11-15); Memorandum of Law in Support (NYSCEF Docket # 16); Affirmation in Support of Motion with exhibits (NYSCEF Docket #s 42-76); Affirmation in Reply (NYSCEF Docket # 77); Affirmation in Support (NYSCEF Docket # 79); Notice of Cross-Motion (NYSCEF Docket # 26); Affirmation in Support with exhibits (NYSCEF Docket #s 27-31); Affirmation in Opposition to Cross-Motion with exhibits (NYSCEF Docket # 32-37); Memorandum of Law in Opposition to Cross-Motion (NYSCEF Docket # 38); Affirmation in Reply (NYSCEF Docket # 40); Affirmation (NYSCEF Docket # 78).

This constitutes the Decision and Order of the Court.

Dated: May 7, 2024



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Honorable Daniel J. Doyle, JSC

# **EXHIBIT B**

SUPREME COURT IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
APPELLATE DIVISION: FOURTH DEPARTMENT

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MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member  
of the New York State Assemble, TAWN FEENY and  
SUSAN LUNDGREN,

Plaintiffs-respondents,

v.

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro  
Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, THE  
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
CARL HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly,

Defendants-Appellants,

and

NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS,  
ROBERT ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate,  
WILLIAM BARCLAY, as Minority Leader of the  
Assembly,

Defendants.

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LAURA LADD BIERMAN, being duly sworn, states:

1. I am the current Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of New York State (the “League”). I am over 18 years of age, of sound mind and otherwise able to make this affidavit. I make this affidavit in support of Defendants-Appellants’ Appeal of the from the Livingston County Supreme Court’s Decision and Order (the “Order”) in favor of respondents based on my personal knowledge. All facts stated in this affidavit are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I

**Appellate Division  
Case/Docket No. CA 24-  
00764**

**Originating Court No.  
000778-2023**

**AFFIDAVIT**

make this affidavit to describe the impact the delayed proceedings have on the League's ability to educate voters in a timely manner on the Equal Rights Amendment. In this affidavit, I describe (1) the League's position in support of the Equal Rights Amendment's passage, (2) the steps the League has taken to increase the likelihood that the Equal Rights Amendment would pass this November, and (3) the impact the delayed proceedings have had on League staff, members and voters at large.

2. The League is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting active and informed citizen participation in government, including through various initiatives focusing on voter registration and education. This purpose reflects the League's belief that voters are the core of our democracy and should play a critical role in it. One long-held objective of the League is to promote and facilitate voter registration in New York. Voter registration drives are one of the signature public services of the League and its local chapters.

3. The League has 42 local chapters in New York State.

4. The League supports the statewide initiative to place the Equal Rights Amendment ("ERA") on the New York ballot in November 2024. It has been and continues to expend resources to educate voters in coordination with a coalition of other organizations collectively known as New Yorkers for Equal Rights ("NYER") in anticipation that the ERA would be placed on the ballot in November 2024.

5. The League relies on legislative processes to predict ballot initiatives and allocate resources to effectuate its goals. Planning commences over a year prior to a measure's planned-for ballot appearance.

6. In January 2023, the League began organizing and educating local Leagues regarding its planned efforts to educate voters about the ERA.

7. The League held its first campaign event in support of the ERA in March 2024.

8. Lacking clarity with respect to the ERA's status, the League cannot properly conduct its stated mission of educating voters. Voters—and League staff members—expect the initiative to appear on the November 2024 ballot. At present, the League's outreach materials indicate that the amendment will appear on the ballot this November. Its website currently advertises that voters will have the chance to vote on this measure in November 2024. However, many of our own members are unsure of its status and on how to educate the public. They are confused why this measure may not appear on the ballot while other constitutional amendments have passed through identical processes.

9. Since January 2023, the League has expended nearly 400 hours across staff and volunteers to coordinate and prepare for its education campaign concerning the ERA in anticipation of its hoped-for ballot appearance in November 2024.

10. The League's 42 local Leagues have held approximately 30 events and expended over 100 hours educating and encouraging voters to vote in favor of the

ERA since January 2024. The League estimates that it has reached at least 1,500 voters through these events.

11. The League has also hosted over 10 voter registration events where it has educated hundreds of voters about the ERA appearing on the ballot in November. At voter registration events, the League does not advocate for the ERA's passing.

12. Had the League known the proposed amendment would not appear on the November 2024 ballot, it would have expended both monetary and personnel resources differently.

13. As a long-standing source of reliable information on voter registration and ballot initiative news, the League is likewise concerned about the impact this unforeseen delay could have on the League's reputation. Voters may be confused about the measure's absence from the ballot and question the legitimacy and accuracy of the League's information. This could undo the League's hard-earned and long-standing reputation with New Yorkers.

Dated: May 30, 2024

Laurakadd Bierman  
Laura Ladd Bierman

Subscribed to and sworn to me

This 30<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2024

Clark Casada

Notary Public





# **Proposed Amicus Brief**

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# New York Supreme Court

Appellate Division—Fourth Department

MARJORIE BYRNES, individually and as a member of the New York State Assembly, TAWN FEENY and SUSAN LUNDGREN,

No. CA 24-  
00764

*Plaintiffs-Respondents,*

– v. –

THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS, as the President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader of the Senate, THE ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, CARL HEASTIE, as Speaker of the Assembly,

*Defendants-Appellants,*

– and –

NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS, ROBERT ORTT, as Minority Leader of the Senate, and WILLIAM BARCLAY, as Minority Leader of the Assembly,

*Defendants.*

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**Proposed Amicus Brief on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New York State**

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## INTEREST OF THE AMICUS

Amicus the League of Women Voters of New York State (the “League”) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting the informed and active participation of citizens in our democracy. In this mission to empower citizens and to strengthen participation in governance, the League works to increase voter registration and turnout and encourages its members and New Yorkers at large to exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed right to vote. The League strives to protect that right from unnecessary barriers to fully participating in the electoral process. Moreover, the League seeks to educate voters about ballot measures on which they will vote. The League formed in 1919 after the passage of the constitutional amendment granting women’s suffrage and has evolved to become a guardian of voting rights for all eligible voters in New York. It is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of the United States and has 42 local leagues throughout New York.

Over several years, the New York State Legislature has worked through the process to place the Equal Rights Amendment to the New York State Constitution (“ERA”) on the ballot. This amendment would codify additional protections based on gender, age, disability status, and ethnicity and is of paramount importance to New York voters, particularly following the Supreme Court’s overruling of *Roe v. Wade*. The League supports this ballot initiative and has been expending resources

to educate voters in coordination with a coalition of other organizations collectively known as New Yorkers for Equal Rights (“NYER”) in anticipation that the ERA would be placed on the ballot this November. Absent reversal, Plaintiffs’ untimely claim will delay New Yorkers’ vote on the ERA, thereby prejudicing voters and voting rights organizations such as the League. The League cannot properly conduct its stated missions of educating voters under the cloud of confusion caused by removing the ERA from the ballot contrary to voters’ expectations following the Legislature’s votes in favor of placing the ERA on the ballot. Should the Legislature be required to recast their votes, Plaintiffs’ belated procedural challenge further threatens to change the results of the votes already completed by the Legislature consistent with the New York State Constitution, undermining the democratic process and further prejudicing New Yorkers whose rights could otherwise be expanded this November.

### **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

The court below erred by rejecting the defense of laches without properly considering prejudice to New York voters, rather than prejudice to the New York Legislature. New York courts routinely dismiss claims based on the doctrine of laches that may prejudice voters even when brought much more quickly than the claims at issue here. There is a particularly compelling basis to bar a belated complaint filed by a plaintiff, such as Plaintiff Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes,

who took part in the process that serves as the basis for the complaint but then delayed filing the complaint.

Plaintiffs' delay in pursuing this action has already prejudiced voters by creating a cloud of voter confusion as to whether and when the ERA will be placed on the ballot and has further prejudiced voting rights groups' abilities to educate voters, resolve this confusion, and mobilize voters based on this important ballot initiative. Plaintiffs' delay in pursuing this action further threatens to deprive voters of their right to vote on the ERA this November consistent with the New York Constitution, which explicitly provides that the timing of the Attorney General's opinion does not affect the validity of the amendment or the Legislature's vote. Requiring the Legislature to recast their votes further threatens to deprive voters of their right to vote on the ERA altogether as the same result cannot be guaranteed and importantly may deprive New Yorkers of expanded rights they might otherwise secure should the initiative be restored to the ballot and pass this November.

## **STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

### **I. Factual Background.**

The movement to place the ERA on the November 2024 ballot in New York State has long been underway. The New York State Assembly and the New York State Senate (collectively "the Legislature") proposed, debated, and approved the amendment in July 2022 (Record on Appeal ("R.") at 49, 85-88, 492) and January

2023 (*Id.* at 11, 90-141), both times with the Attorney General’s opinion that the ERA would have no effect on other constitutional provisions. *Id.* at 494, 496. This resolution would extend protections to include the following characteristics: ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, and sex including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy. *Id.* at 49. As such, the ERA was set to appear on the ballot for the November 5, 2024, general election. *Id.* at 11.

Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes voted twice against the resolution and expressed her belief that the ERA “is unnecessary and in my opinion wrong.” R. at 85, 127, 138. She did not elaborate further.

The election calendar moves rapidly. New York already held its Presidential primary elections in April. *Id.* at 505. The State Board of Elections (the “Board”) must publish the proposed form of the ballot proposal and abstract for any constitutional amendment at least four months before the election—this year, by July 5, 2024. *See* N.Y. Elec. Law § 4-108(4)(a). A comment period lasts at least 15 days, after which the Board must finalize the ballot proposal and transmit it to each county board of elections at least three months before the election—by August 5, 2024. *Id.* §§ 108(1)(a), 108(4)(a). By September 5, 2024, the Board and all local boards of election must publish the abstracts of the amendment on their websites. *Id.* § 4-

116(1). And military absentee ballots are to be mailed no later than September 20, 2024, forty-six days before the election. *Id.* § 10-108(1)(a).

Accordingly, campaigning in support of the ERA started months ago. *R.* at 505-06. Organizations sought to raise \$20 million for these efforts. *Id.* A kickoff series of campaign events began in March 2024 to “strategize how to get the word out” about the ERA. *Id.* NYER coalition members—including the League—have already commenced their voter education efforts and broadcast the initiative’s planned-for appearance on the November 2024 New York ballot on their websites.<sup>1</sup> Bierman Aff. ¶¶ 4, 6-11.

## **II. Procedural Background.**

Plaintiff Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes, along with Tawn Feeny and Sarah Lundgren (collectively the “Plaintiffs”), filed this suit on October 30, 2023, against her colleagues in the Legislature and the Board. *R.* at 40-41.

Plaintiffs sought a declaratory judgment to invalidate “the Legislature’s adoption of a resolution on July 1, 2022 related to the proposed amendment of § 11 of Article I of the Constitution.” *Id.* at 41. Such a declaratory judgment would order the Board “to remove [the] proposed amendment to the Constitution from the ballot

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<sup>1</sup> *The NY Equal Rights Amendment*, LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF N.Y., <https://lwvny.org/nys-equal-rights-amendment/> (last visited May 24, 2024).

proposals that will appear for the consideration of the voters at the November 5, 2024 general election.” *Id.*.

The Supreme Court granted Plaintiffs’ request on May 7, 2024. *Id.* at 7-37 (Decision and Order (*Byrnes v. Senate of the State of N.Y.*, 2024 WL 2006346 at \*1, 12 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. May 7, 2024))). In contravention of the plain text of New York State Constitution Article XIX, § 1, the court below erroneously concluded that the Legislature cannot vote on a proposed amendment to the Constitution until receipt of the Attorney General’s opinion of any such amendment. *Id.* at 9.

## ARGUMENT

### **I. Laches Bars this Action Because the Delayed Filing Prejudices Voters.**

#### 1. Plaintiffs Took Too Long to File This Action.

The doctrine of laches bars Plaintiffs’ claim.<sup>2</sup> Plaintiffs take issue with only the first ERA vote on July 1, 2022. *R.* at 43, 46. The Legislature adopted a second concurrent resolution in favor of the proposed amendment on January 24, 2023. *Id.* at 43. Plaintiffs did not file this action until October 30, 2023, almost sixteen months following the initial vote and nine months after the second. *Id.* at 46.

New York State courts routinely prohibit untimely election-related actions from proceeding when doing so may prejudice voters. *See, e.g., Amedure v. State,*

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<sup>2</sup> Defendants preserved this argument—and the heightened prejudicial concern when voting rights are at issue—in their Memorandum of Law in Support of their Motion to Dismiss. *Id.* at 249, 255; *see also* Br. Defs.-Appellants 34-35, ECF No. 6.

178 N.Y.S. 3d 220, 225 (N.Y. App. Div. 3d Dep’t 2022). “It is well settled that where neglect in promptly asserting a claim for relief causes prejudice to one’s adversary, such neglect operates as a bar to a remedy and is a basis for asserting the defense of laches. The essential element is delay prejudicial to the opposing party.” *Id.* at 223 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). Voters are among the impacted parties considered in election matters. *See League of Women Voters of N.Y. State v. N.Y. State Bd. of Elections*, 206 A.D. 3d 1227, 1230 (N.Y. App. Div. 3d Dept. 2022) [hereinafter “*LOWV*”] (“Petitioner’s delay results in significant and immeasurable prejudice to voters ....”), *leave to appeal denied*, 190 N.E.3d 570 (N.Y. 2022), *re-argument denied*, 192 N.E.3d 1152 (N.Y. 2022); *see also Lauer v. Bd. of Elections of N.Y.C.*, 266 N.Y.S. 728, 732 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1933) (“The whole scheme of the Election Law at bottom is to secure to the voter the right to vote . . . .”). These matters “are exceedingly time sensitive and protracted delays . . . impose impossible burdens” on parties “obligated to comply with the strict timelines set forth in the Election Law.” *LOWV*, 206 A.D. 3d at 1230.

Plaintiffs delayed bringing this action for almost sixteen months. Courts invoke laches for far shorter periods. The court in *LOWV* called a sixteen-*day* delay “protracted, avoidable and unexplained” and found that “petitioner’s failure to exercise due diligence requires dismissal of the proceeding/action under the equitable doctrine of laches.” *Id.* Another court found a two-month delay in

challenging a local law “unreasonable and unexcused.” *MacDonald v. Cnty. of Monroe*, 191 N.Y.S. 3d 578, 592-93 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2023) (Doyle, J.) (adding that even a two-week delay would be sufficient to invoke laches). A third likewise considered a two-and-a-half-month delay “too long.” *Matter of Cantrell v. Hayduk*, 383 N.E.2d 871 (N.Y. 1978). The *Amedure* court held that petitioners who delayed nine months took “too long in bringing this proceeding/action,” explaining that “granting petitioners the requested relief during an ongoing election would be extremely disruptive and profoundly destabilizing and prejudicial to . . . voters.” *Amedure*, 178 N.Y.S. 3d at 1138-39. Plaintiffs’ sixteen-month delay in this action is thus far too long and likewise profoundly prejudicial to voters.

2. There Is No Excuse for Delay Because Byrnes Was Well Aware of This Issue Months Before Suing.

Plaintiff Majorie Byrnes is a member of the New York State Assembly who was first elected in November 2018.<sup>3</sup> R. at 40. She has been in office throughout the procedures to place the ERA on the ballot, voting against adopting the Concurrent Resolution on both July 1, 2022 and on January 24, 2023. *Id.* at 45, 85, 138. The Assemblywoman said in May of 2024 that state Democrats operated from a “level of arrogance that they’re so used to running over the minority to do whatever

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<sup>3</sup> *Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes: Biography*, N.Y. ASSEMBLY, <https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Marjorie-Byrnes/bio/> (last visited May 22, 2024)



they want – everyone else be damned.”<sup>4</sup> This statement fails to consider that the majority’s will is precisely what is at stake and that her belated action was filed to invalidate votes cast consistent with the New York Constitution and to deprive New Yorkers of the opportunity to vote for the ERA in November, thereby subverting the democratic process and the will of the voters.

*Cantrell* is instructive. The proposal at issue was “the subject of considerable debate and study for some time prior to its approval.” *Cantrell*, 383 N.E.2d at 871. The Petitioners were “well aware” of the proposal and had legal representation at the public hearings conducted prior to its adoption. *Id.* They sued to enjoin the proposal from reaching the ballot over two months after the County Executive approved the measure and a mere month before the election. *Id.* In ruling against the petitioners, the Court explained that “[r]ather than acting with due diligence” their “delay imposed a well nigh impossible burden upon respondents. To condone the attempted resolution of these issues in such an unnecessarily precipitous manner would do a great disservice to the [citizens] whose interests are most deeply impacted in this proceeding.” *Id.* at 871-72. Byrnes’s conduct both parallels and exceeds this. She voted on the measure *twice*, rather than just appearing through counsel. R. at 45, 85, 138. Her position was rejected by the majority acting on

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<sup>4</sup> Nick Reisman, Emily Ngo & Jeff Coltin, *Marjorie Byrnes’ ERA Lawsuit*, POLITICO (May 15, 2024, 7:08 AM), <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/new-york-playbook/2024/05/15/marjorie-byrnes-lawsuit-era-00158065>.

behalf of their constituents both times. *Id.* at 85, 138.<sup>5</sup> And now, contrary to the will of the majority, Byrnes seeks to prevent citizens from voting on an initiative that otherwise could expand New Yorkers’ rights this November. She took sixteen months to bring this action. This left no time for an orderly appeals process, instead necessitating an expedited appeal to have a *chance* at hearing the matter before the Board publishes the proposed ballot in July. *See* Brockner Aff. ¶¶ 14-15. Doing otherwise would push the decision-point past the rigid election-law mandated deadlines.

## **II. Voters and Voting Rights Organizations Are Prejudiced.**

### **1. Plaintiffs’ Delay in Bringing Suit Results in Significant and Immeasurable Prejudice to New York Voters.**

As demonstrated by the majority’s votes in the Legislature on behalf of their constituents, New Yorkers want to vote on this measure. To rule against the State Senate and the Board of Elections would upend years of work to secure the measure’s place on the 2024 ballot during a presidential election year when turnout can be expected to be higher. The challenged vote from 2022 occurred during the prior Legislature’s tenure, meaning voters in the November 2022 election knew the

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<sup>5</sup> Over 67 percent of her colleagues voted for the measure each time. In July 2022, 95 of 140 Assembly members approved the measure. *Id.* at 85. In January 2023, 97 of 143 Assembly members approved the measure. *Id.* at 138.

second resolution would be at issue in 2023 when voting. Citizen votes on ballot measures reflect especially acute insights into the will of the people.<sup>6</sup>

As New York courts have done in prior cases, the Court should focus on prejudice to the voters. *See, e.g., LOWV*, 206 A.D. 3d at 1230 (the delay would cause “significant and immeasurable prejudice *to voters*” and others) (emphasis added); *see also Lauer*, 266 N.Y.S. at 732 (“The whole scheme of the Election Law at bottom is to secure to the voter the right to vote . . . .”). The court below, in rejecting Defendants’ laches argument, ignored the prejudice to voters after erroneously concluding that “the voters have no right to vote on an amendment placed on the ballot in derogation of the procedures required by Constitution.” *See generally, R.* at 31-33. Aside from contradicting the New York State Constitution—which expressly provides that the timing of the Attorney General’s opinion shall not “affect the validity of such proposed amendment” under Article XIX, § 1—the ruling below is based on a single, inapposite, 85-year-old decision. *Id.* at 33. Unlike here, the delay in the cited case was excusable because the parties “were attempting, during a large portion of the time intervening between the submission . . . to correct the alleged defects in the charter through legislation without resort to the courts.” *See*

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<sup>6</sup> *See* Leslie Graves, *The Pathfinder: Ballot Measures – An Important Form of Direct Democracy*, PBS (Mar. 21, 2024), <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/preserving-democracy/2024/03/21/ballot-measures-an-important-form-of-direct-democracy/> (“The history and evolution of ballot measures can tell us a lot about voters’ changing attitudes, policy preferences, and leading concerns”).

*Town of Cortlandt v. Vill. of Peekskill*, 281 N.Y. 490, 498 (1939). The Court expressed “no opinion” on the constitutional question. *Id.*

Among other rights enshrined in the ERA, voters have demonstrated an intense interest at this time in women’s reproductive rights, which are central to the ERA. Nationwide, citizens have voted on six different state-constitutional amendments regarding abortion rights since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and have protected those rights every time.<sup>7</sup> Studies suggest that 70 percent of people want their states to use ballot measures to address state-wide abortion rights.<sup>8</sup> Polling indicates that 92% of voters agree that citizen-led ballot initiatives are “an important way for citizens to pass policies they care about and 93% agree that legislators have an obligation to carry out the will of the people.”<sup>9</sup> Voters also often cross party lines on such ballot measures. Indeed, many of the states whose people have protected abortion rights are traditionally conservative states.<sup>10</sup>

Delaying the people’s vote on the ERA will further cause significant and immeasurable prejudice to individuals whose rights could otherwise be expanded

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<sup>7</sup> *Ballot Tracker: Status of Abortion-Related State Constitutional Amendment Measures for the 2024 Election*, KFF, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/dashboard/ballot-tracker-status-of-abortion-related-state-constitutional-amendment-measures/> (May 29, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Majority of Americans Would Vote in Favor of Abortion Legality in Hypothetical State-Level Ballot Measure*, IPSOS (Aug. 10, 2022), <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/state-level-abortion-ballots>.

<sup>9</sup> *New Polling: Strong Bipartisan Support for Citizen-Initiated Ballot Initiatives*, BALLOT INITIATIVE STRATEGY CTR. (Feb. 12, 2024), <https://ballot.org/news/new-polling-strong-bipartisan-support-for-citizen-initiated-ballot-initiatives/>.

<sup>10</sup> See *Ballot Tracker*, *supra* n.7.

this November. Per ERA advocates, the amendment will benefit “pregnant New Yorkers, women, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, older adults, and people from different countries and cultures.”<sup>11</sup> New Yorkers—regardless of whether they fall into these categories—have reasonably anticipated that they will have the opportunity to vote to expand their own or others’ protections during the 2024 general election. Voters will likely be disheartened to find that the ERA disappeared from the ballot, which could lead voters to distrust information as to whether and when they may be able to vote on the ERA in the future as well.

## 2. The League and Similarly Situated Voting Rights Organizations Are Prejudiced.

The League and other voting rights organizations are prejudiced by the confusion over whether the ERA will appear on the ballot in November. These organizations have already moved en masse to mobilize voters in anticipation of this ballot measure. In January 2023, the League began organizing and educating local Leagues regarding its planned efforts to educate voters about the ERA. Bierman Aff. ¶ 6. The NYER coalition formed in mid-2023 to boost the measure’s prospects, expecting to raise \$20 million and to engage in a multi-pronged grassroots effort to educate the population in advance of that vote.<sup>12</sup> The League works with NYER,

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<sup>11</sup> Nick Reisman, *How Democrats, Advocates Are Mobilizing for Equal Rights Amendment in New York*, SPECTRUM NEWS 1 (June 29, 2023, 11:10 AM), <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/ny-state-of-politics/2023/06/29/how-democrats--advocates-are-mobilizing-for-equal-rights-amendment>.

<sup>12</sup> Reisman, *supra* n.11.

which “advocat[es] for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.”<sup>13</sup> NYER’s website instructs that “New Yorkers *will* have the opportunity to vote on the Amendment in 2024.”<sup>14</sup> The League has individually—and in conjunction with NYER—expended hundreds of hours across both staff and volunteers to coordinate and prepare for its education campaign. Bierman Aff. ¶¶ 9-10

The court’s decision below, however, is creating confusion among both voters and the organizations that seek to educate voters. The Board typically clarifies the ballot language four months before the election—this year, by July 5, 2024. Election Law § 4-108(4)(a). The public then has at least 15 days to comment, which the Board reviews and considers before finalizing the ballot proposal three months prior to the election. *Id.* § 4-108(1)(a). This year, that would occur by August 5, 2024. *Id.* These procedures ensure that New Yorkers know what is on the ballot, and this belated suit and decision counter that goal. NYER and the League similarly rely on these deadlines in educating voters. Instead, this untimely action may cause voters to distrust the process, to distrust information relating to the ERA provided in the past, and to distrust voters’ abilities to rely on the accuracy of information provided by voting rights organizations in the future. Articles discussing the measure

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<sup>13</sup> *About Us*, N.Y. EQUAL RTS., <https://nyequalrights.org/> (last visited May 22, 2024).

<sup>14</sup> *FAQ*, N.Y. EQUAL RTS., <https://nyequalrights.org/> (last visited May 22, 2024) (emphasis added).

highlight the newfound uncertainty, writing that the measure is off the ballot “for now”<sup>15</sup> and that its fate “is now in flux.”<sup>16</sup>

The coalition specifically worked to get the ERA on the November 2024 general election ballot to capture voters’ enthusiasm during a presidential election cycle. Such elections historically enjoy the nation’s highest voter turnout.<sup>17</sup> On June 29, 2023, the New York Times reported that New York’s Governor, Kathy Hochul, understood that numerous organizations “chose to bring the amendment to a statewide vote in 2024, rather than this year [2023] as the state is legally entitled, to create space for its message to penetrate. The timing, during a presidential election year, should maximize the campaign’s efforts.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Mahoney, *New York’s Abortion Rights Amendment Thrown Off Ballot, For Now*, POLITICO (May 7, 2024, 1:00 PM), <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/07/equal-right-amendment-era-new-york-00156521>.

<sup>16</sup> Grace Ashford & Claire Fahy, *Why the Equal Rights Amendment Is Again a Hot Topic in New York*, N.Y. TIMES (May 18, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/18/nyregion/new-york-ballot-equal-rights.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Michael P. McDonald, *National Turnout Rates 1789-Present*, U.S. ELECTIONS PROJECT, <https://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present> (last visited May 24, 2024) (analyzing historical and current data on U.S. voter turnout and finding consistently higher engagement during presidential election years); see also Jennifer Andrus, *Supporters of New York ERA Ballot Referendum Prepare for Uphill Battle for Passage in November*, NYSBA (Jan. 19, 2024), <https://nysba.org/supporters-of-new-york-era-ballot-referendum-prepare-for-uphill-battle-for-passage-in-november/#:~:text=A%20panel%20of%20legislators%2C%20activists,support%20an%20Equal%20Rights%20Amendment> (“Legislators and their staff acknowledge that it’s important for the statewide referendum to land in a presidential year to benefit from the larger voter turnout.”).

<sup>18</sup> Dana Rubinstein, *Democrats to Use \$20 Million Equal Rights Push to Aid 2024 N.Y. House Bids*, N.Y. TIMES (June 29, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/29/nyregion/equal-rights-amendment-ny.html>.

The people are entitled to see this measure on the ballot. As constitutionally required, the matter has passed through both chambers of the New York State legislature. The coalition then continued to spend and raise money with hopes of passing the ERA as the proposed amendment satisfied each step necessary to appear on the 2024 general election ballot. Bierman Aff. ¶ 4. Had members of the coalition known that their work would be for naught, they likely would have expended resources elsewhere or saved them to deploy at the right time. *See id.* ¶ 12 (the League would have expended resources differently). Instead, the coalition has strategically planned and fundraised for years to see this measure on this specific ballot during a presidential election year when the turnout is expected to be higher. The lower court’s decision prejudices the coalition by undoing their work and wasting their resources.

The League, itself, is similarly impacted. Election misinformation has run rampant in the digital age.<sup>19</sup> The League, however, has been a reliable source of election information for voters since its inception in 1919.<sup>20</sup> Following the legislature’s second passage of the concurrent resolution, the League advised on its website that “the public will have the opportunity to vote on the measure [to enact

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<sup>19</sup> *Election Misinformation*, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE, <https://www.brennancenter.org/election-misinformation> (last visited May 24, 2024).

<sup>20</sup> *About Us*, LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF N.Y., <https://lwvny.org/about/> (last visited May 30, 2024).



the ERA] in 2024.”<sup>21</sup> It specifies that this is “[b]ecause the constitutional amendment passed twice in the legislature.”<sup>22</sup> Voters who have come to rely on the League for accurate election information are likely to be confused by the ERA’s conspicuous absence from the ballot. Bierman Aff. ¶ 13. They may then reasonably question the legitimacy and accuracy of one of their trusted sources for election information, which could undermine the League’s long-standing reputation and reliability. *Id.*

The League’s members are themselves unsure about the state of the ballot measure. *Id.* ¶ 8. Many are confused about what to tell the public concerning the ERA, wondering what the Court will decide and whether it will render its decision in time to include the ERA measure this November. *Id.* They are likewise perplexed that *this* amendment may fail to be voted on despite following the same procedures as many other amendments that have since passed into law. *Id.*

For the foregoing reasons and those set forth in the brief of Defendants-Appellants, the Court should reverse the Supreme Court’s judgment and declare the action to be barred by the doctrine of laches as a result of the significant and immeasurable prejudice it is causing to New York voters and voting rights organizations.

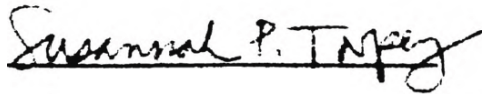
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<sup>21</sup> *The NY Equal Rights Amendment, supra* n.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

Dated: May 31, 2024

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## **PRINTING SPECIFICATIONS STATEMENT**

In accordance with the New York Practice Rules of the Appellate Division Rule 1250.8(j), Proposed Amicus Curiae League of Women Voters of New York State provides this Printing Specifications Statement.

The forgoing brief was prepared on a computer. A proportionally spaced typeface was used as follows:

Name of Typeface: Times New Roman

Point Size: 14 (12 for footnotes)

Line Spacing: Double (single for footnotes)

The total number of words in the brief, inclusive of point headings and footnotes and exclusive of pages containing the Table of Contents and this printing specifications statement, is 4,084.