



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 26, 2026

Contact: Clyanna Lightbourn, Campaign Director, League of Women Voters of NYS
(305) 798-5992

clyanna@lwvny.org

New York's Democratic Election Commissioners Back Democracy During Detention Act (DDDA) As 2026 State Legislative Priority

Support from dozens of local election officials underscores urgent need to modernize voter access for eligible citizens detained in jails

Albany – New York voting rights advocates applaud the adoption of the *Democracy During Detention Act* ([DDDA](#)) as a 2026 legislative priority by New York's Democratic Election Commissioners' Caucus of the State's election commissioners association ([NYSECA](#)), at the annual Winter gathering of local election officials from across the state. Each year, election commissioners and key staff come together to share best practices and identify voting policies that can modernize and improve New York elections. This year, the Democratic election commissioners included DDDA in their [2026 Caucus Legislative Priorities](#). DDDA provides election officials with a flexible framework to address barriers to voter access faced by eligible citizens detained in jails during elections.

Although most citizens detained in New York jails retain their right to vote, meaningful access to the ballot is often severely limited or blocked altogether. In the absence of a clear statewide framework, actual voter access varies widely by county and facility, often depending on the discretion of local sheriffs, corrections staff, or volunteer civic groups—none of whom are charged by law with administering elections. These barriers disproportionately affect low-income New Yorkers and communities of color. A [2023 survey](#) found only 11 of the 57 counties outside New York City had “meaningful and effective programs” to facilitate voting by detained citizens.

The DDDA ([S440 \(Myrie\) / A2121 \(Walker\)](#)) addresses this gap by clarifying the responsibility of Boards of Elections to provide voter education, registration, and ballot access for eligible detained citizens, in coordination with corrections. The legislation directs local election and correction officials to develop a facility voter access plan for upcoming elections, authorizes secure jail-based poll sites, expands the bipartisan in-person absentee ballot collection program used successfully in other congregate settings like large nursing homes, improves procedural integrity and safeguards to prevent disenfranchisement, and ensures parity of access for voters

with disabilities and limited English proficiency—while maintaining security and local flexibility across urban, suburban, and rural facilities statewide.

The proposal has already garnered broad support, with 14 Senate sponsors and 27 Assembly sponsors. Proponents include a diverse coalition of civil rights, civic, faith-based, and legal organizations, including the Sentencing Project, the Brennan Center for Justice, NAACP New York State Conference, The Black Institute, Citizen Action of NY, Vocal NY, NYS League of Women Voters, Common Cause NY, NYC Bar Association, Alliance of Families for Justice, Brooklyn Voters Alliance, Faith in New York, the NYIC, and Vote Early New York among many other organizations. Advocates say the Democratic commissioners' endorsement marks a pivotal turning point toward ensuring that New York laws reflect a simple principle: eligible citizens awaiting trial or convicted of minor offenses do not lose their fundamental rights at the jailhouse door.

State Senator and Former Senate Elections Chair Zellnor Myrie said: “Ensuring fair elections means removing unnecessary barriers to the ballot. The Democracy During Detention Act affirms that eligible voters in local jails retain their constitutional rights and deserve clear, consistent access to voting. I look forward to continuing our work to make our elections more fair and more accessible to all voters.”

State Assembly Election Law Chair, Assemblymember Latrice Walker said: “Let me share a documented fact that some just don’t get: Most people detained in jails across the state of New York are still eligible to vote. To make sure these New Yorkers have the opportunity to exercise their right to vote, I sponsored the Democracy During Detention Act. Democracy works best when participation is protected everywhere, and that includes our local jails.”

New York State Lieutenant Governor and Attorney Antonio Delgado said: “Our democracy works best when everyone who’s eligible has a real chance to participate in it. Right now, too many New Yorkers sitting in local jails are shut out simply because the system wasn’t built with them in mind. That’s not just a technical failure; it’s a democratic one. The Democracy During Detention Act is about fixing that and making sure our elections reflect basic values of fairness, dignity, and equal voice.”

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said: “As District Attorney, I firmly believe in our shared responsibility to protect all New Yorkers’ constitutional rights rather than restrict them. The Democracy During Detention Act will ensure that eligible voters do not lose their voice simply because they are detained, strengthening equity in our democratic process, enhancing trust in the legal system, and increasing participation in elections.”

NYSECA Democratic Caucus Chair and Onondaga County Election Commissioner Dustin Czarny said: “The Democratic Caucus of the NYS Elections Commissioner Association supports the Democracy During Detention Act. We believe that all citizens who are eligible to vote should take part in our Democracy. Expanding access to the ballot box to those who are

eligible, but in detention, is an important next step to the expansion of our Democracy that has taken place since 2019.”

Ulster County Election Commissioner and NYSECA First Vice President Ashley Torres said: “DDDA brings much-needed clarity to an area of election administration that has too often relied on ad hoc solutions. Clear standards benefit voters, election officials, and the integrity of our democratic system.”

Executive Director, Erica Smitka, League of Women Voters of New York State, said: “Democracy does not stop at the jail door. The Democracy During Detention Act ensures that eligible citizens held in local jails have consistent access to the ballot by making clear that Boards of Elections are responsible for administering voting, just as they are everywhere else in New York.”

#