



**New York City Campaign Finance Board**  
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**Testimony of Eric Friedman  
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**New York State Senate Elections Committee  
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Good morning, Chair Myrie and members of the New York State Senate Elections Committee. My name is Eric Friedman and I am the Assistant Executive Director for Public Affairs at the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the New York Voting Rights Act today.

The CFB is mandated by the New York City Charter to encourage and facilitate voter registration and voting by all eligible residents of New York City, but particularly among underrepresented populations. It is our goal to ensure all eligible voters can cast a ballot with ease and without discrimination.

We believe the New York Voting Rights Act (NYVRA) is an important step towards ensuring all eligible New Yorkers of voting age, no matter their race, age, sex, gender, country of origin, or language ability have equal access to the ballot.

As you know, the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) outlines language minority provisions to ensure limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals are not excluded from the electoral process. While New York City currently provides interpretation services and translation of election-related materials—including the CFB’s Voter Guide—in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Bengali, hundreds of other languages are spoken by New York City residents. Out of our 1.8 million LEP residents, about 300,000 speak a language that is not protected under the federal VRA.

Providing interpretation services and translating election materials into more languages for underrepresented groups is essential to increasing participation in our democracy. Often times these communities do not receive adequate guidance at the polls, which can prevent them from voting as they intended or deter them from voting at all. Our research shows that lack of information is the main barrier to participation in our elections.

The NYVRA could potentially expand the requirement to provide translation and interpretation services for ballots, pollsite assistance, and even voter guides to include several languages not covered under the federal VRA formula. This will represent a significant and worthwhile investment in expanding access to voting information for these currently underserved populations.

Our analysis of voter behavior in previous election cycles also shows that turnout is especially low in neighborhoods with high naturalization rates, which are often neighborhoods with limited English proficiency. For this reason, we have set an ambitious goal to register and engage 20,000 naturalized citizens in 2020, specifically in 10 neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens with high naturalization rates and low voter turnout. By expanding language access to voting materials, the NYVRA will help the CFB accomplish this goal as well.

The CFB willingly complied with the preclearance requirements under the federal VRA until the Supreme Court eliminated them. The NYVRA's section on pre-clearance replaces that at the state level. The CFB has previously supported state pre-clearance legislation meant to replace the federal Voting Rights Act. It is our responsibility to ensure that jurisdictions cannot roll back the rights voters have gained.

Requiring government agencies to seek approval from the state Attorney General's office prior to changing voting procedures is an important protection to ensure no New Yorker will face new obstacles to casting a ballot. Situating review in the Attorney General's office, like in the federal VRA, is the appropriate location for such a provision. The U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Bureau also handles violations of the VRA, so the state Attorney General's office is the logical location for the NYVRA's pre-clearance provision. The CFB welcomes this important

oversight that aims to guarantee New Yorkers' access to the polls or to important voting information will not be undermined by any future administrative action.

The CFB is supportive of the New York Voting Rights Act and what it aims to achieve. Like the intent of the federal Voting Rights Act before being rolled back, this will ensure all New Yorkers of voting age have equal access to the ballot.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, I'm happy to answer any questions.