



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority to Pass Legislation to Reform New York’s Local Boards of Elections

(Albany, NY) Tomorrow, January 10, 2023, the Senate Democratic Majority will pass legislation to reform the operations of New York’s local boards of elections. This suite of legislation builds on the Senate Majority Conference’s work to expand voting rights and reform our election system. The legislative package includes provisions to restructure the New York City Board of Elections; update requirements for holding public hearings before BOE appointments; update the qualifications of a commissioner to be appointed; prohibit commissioners and deputies from holding public office; prohibit conflict of interests; require commissioners to be full time employees; remove a commissioner under certain circumstances; set minimum staffing levels; increase the compensation of election inspectors; split shifts for election inspectors or poll workers; mandate annual training for election commissioners and develop and provide county training materials for a “train the trainer” poll worker program.

“Our local boards of elections play an essential role in upholding democracy and safeguarding New Yorkers’ right to vote,” **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “This package of legislation will enact much needed, common sense reforms that will modernize the operations of local boards of elections across the state with an eye to improving New Yorkers’ voting experience. These reforms will markedly upgrade the administration of elections and bolster public confidence in the democratic process. I commend Election Chair Senator Zellnor Myrie and the bill sponsors for their work on this critical issue.”

Bill sponsor and Chair of the Committee on Elections, Senator Zellnor Myrie said, “As Elections Committee Chair, I was proud to lead hearings across the state in 2021 where we learned first-hand about the issues facing New York voters. We issued a landmark report calling for major changes to the way New York conducts its elections, from how poll workers are trained to how commissioners are appointed and removed. I’m grateful to my Senate Majority colleagues for prioritizing these reforms and look forward to seeing them signed into law.”

Every year since 2019, the Senate Democratic Majority has made expanding access to the ballot box and reforming our state’s election process the first order of business in the legislative session. Last year the Senate Majority passed voting rights legislation to empower more New Yorkers to exercise their franchise, including the historic [John R. Lewis New York Voting Rights Act](#), a nation leading law that strengthens voter protections and prohibits suppressive voter practices.

In the wake of embarrassing incidents in the administration of the June 2021 primary elections in several New York counties, the Senate Majority conducted a series of five (5) public hearings on election reforms and board of elections practices. The hearings provided an opportunity for voters to speak about their experiences at the ballot box. Lawmakers heard testimony from voters, election administrators, and poll workers, voting rights advocates and good government groups on how to improve New York's election process. Following the hearings, the Senate Election Committee under the leadership of Chair, Senator Zellnor Myrie released a landmark report with policy recommendations on reforming the operations of local boards of elections, boosting voter participation and making the election process more efficient. The policy recommendations in the report inform the bills in this legislation package.

The legislation that will be passed by the Senate Majority includes:

- **Restructuring of the New York City Board of Elections:** This bill, [S.619](#), sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger restructures the exercise of powers and duties of the New York City Board of Elections and its executive management. The bill reduces the NYCBOE size from 10 to 2 commissioners and concentrates authority in an Executive Director selected after a nationwide search. The bill also requires that staff hired and promoted by the NYCBOE be qualified to carry out their duties.
- **Minimum Requirements for Commissioners Qualifications:** This bill, [S.645](#), sponsored by Senator John Mannion requires a commissioner to meet certain qualifications before their appointment, including demonstrated experience in election administration, or other administration or operations experience in the public, non-profit or private sectors.
- **Prohibiting Commissioners from Holding Public Office:** This bill, [S.614](#), sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie prohibits election commissioners and deputy commissioners from holding a publicly elected office or from being the respective chair of the county Democratic or Republican committees.
- **Prohibiting Conflicts of Interest:** This bill, [S.612](#), sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer, prohibits financial and professional conflicts of interests among board of elections employees caused by outside income relating to the administration of elections and supervision of elections in which they are candidates.
- **Make Commissioners Full Time Employees:** This bill, [S.611](#), sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer, makes commissioners full time employees of the Board of Elections.
- **Mandatory Training for Commissioners:** This bill, [S.617](#), sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, requires Election Commissioners and key staff at Boards of Elections to take an annual training on election administration.

- **Removal of Commissioners:** This bill, [S.585](#), sponsored by Senator Rachel May, allows for the New York State Board of Elections to remove an election commissioner. Removal on the grounds of incompetence, misconduct or other good cause will be provided prior to any action and not before the election commissioner is given a written copy of alleged charges and an opportunity to present a defense.
- **Full-Time Employee Minimums:** This bill, [S.644](#), sponsored by Senator John W. Mannion, requires every board of elections to employ a minimum of four full time employees in addition to the appointed commissioners and two additional employees for every twenty thousand active registered voters beyond forty thousand active registered voters.
- **Pay Raise for Poll Workers:** This bill, [S.136](#), sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger increases compensation of election inspectors statewide to no less than \$300, and election coordinators in New York City to no less than \$350. The bill also amends the election law to increase pay of election inspectors and poll clerks for required training to \$50 for each meeting.
- **Splitting Shifts Among Inspectors and Clerks:** This bill, [S.609](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman, allows for election inspectors and poll clerks to work half-day or 8-hour shifts on Election Day with adjusted compensation to reflect reduced work hours worked.
- **Mandatory Curriculum for Certified Poll Worker Training:** This bill, [S.587](#), sponsored by Senator Leroy Comrie ensures proper training for poll workers by requiring a mandatory curriculum for certified poll worker training and “train the trainer” programs.
- **Exempting Poll Workers’ Earnings from Federal Adjusted Gross Income:** This bill, [S.613A](#), sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie subtracts from the federal adjusted gross income any compensation earned by election workers while on election duty, from being included in the calculation of the amount of benefits under public assistance programs.

Bill sponsor, Senator Leroy Comrie said, “Poll workers serve as a crucial link in making voting rights a reality. Upgrading training for poll workers will better equip them to assist voters. Every New Yorker deserves a smooth, positive experience at the polls. With the appropriate curriculum, training, and certifications advanced by [S587B](#), we will assist poll workers in delivering that positive experience at the polls. Thanks to Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues for focusing on this package of measures to uplift voting rights and ensure New Yorkers’ votes count.”

Bill sponsor, Senator Brad Hoylman said, “Our country has lost around 130,000 poll workers over the course of the past three midterm elections. The MAGA-right’s rising attacks on our elections is making poll workers fear for their safety – and driving them away in droves. Worse is that New York forces our poll workers to work 16-hour shifts - unheard of in most other

professions. Our bill ([S609](#)) changes that. With split 8-hour shifts, which are already afforded to election inspectors, we hope to increase our poll worker count and ensure the people who make up a fundamental part of our democracy are not overworked. I thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for strengthening the New York electoral process today.”

Bill sponsor, Senator Liz Krueger said: "It is critical that New York voters are able to be confident that their voting experience will be smooth, and their vote will be counted. I'm proud to join my colleagues in this important package of bills, which includes my legislation to increase pay for elections inspectors and to professionalize the New York City Board of Elections so that we can avoid the fiascos we have witnessed in several recent cycles."

Bill sponsor, Senator John Mannion said, “As someone who has firsthand experience with the challenges that can arise in close elections, I understand the importance of having strong, competent leadership at the local level. That is why I am proud to support these elections reform bills, which will help ensure that our local boards of elections are properly staffed and that our elections commissioners are qualified and capable of fulfilling their duties. These reforms will help strengthen the integrity and fairness of our elections, and will give voters the confidence that their votes are being counted accurately and fairly.”

Bill sponsor, Senator Rachel May said, “We must continue strengthening election integrity by ensuring voters can be confident in officials to carry out free and fair elections. My bill in this package will allow the bipartisan state board of elections to remove an election commissioner for incompetence, misconduct, or other good cause, providing accountability and transparency in our elections. Trust in our election process is critical, and I look forward to moving this bill package forward with my colleagues in the Senate Majority.”

Bill sponsor, Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, “It is essential to the integrity of the Democratic process that free and fair elections are protected in New York State, as well as the United States. I am proud to sponsor two pieces of legislation within this Election Reform package, part of our historic commitment to improving New York’s system of elections. My bill, [S.612](#) will eliminate the risk of conflicts of interest that arise when Board of Elections’ employees also run for office or work for a candidate or company involved in election administration. My other bill in this package, [S.611](#), would require Commissioners of County Boards of Elections to be full time employees of the Board, reducing the possibility of conflicts and ensuring that there is full attention to the operations of every election. I thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues for their dedication and commitment to improving elections in New York State, and continuing to make election access and integrity touchstones of our Democratic Conference.”

Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director said, “NYPIRG applauds the state Senate for advancing additional elections reforms. While much has already been done, New York still has a ways to go to be a national leader. Governor Hochul and state lawmakers have to keep at it.”

Dustin Czarny, Chair of the NYS Elections Commissioner Democratic Caucus said: "The New York Senate's continued focus on our Democracy is laudable and prescient in this time of election denial and voter suppression. The tradition of first day election reforms sets the tone for

the rest of the session. These reforms will enhance the experience of voters, protect and compensate poll workers, and give campaigns and the public more information. These bills also give added responsibilities to Boards of Elections while also allocating resources to accomplish those goals and a better ability to hold us accountable to the public. I applaud the Senate for their work and look forward to their eventual passage in the Assembly.”

Betsy Gotbaum, executive director of Citizens Union said, “The bills passed today by the Senate represent an important step in improving New York’s broken election administration system, and build on the work the legislature has done in recent years to protect and expand the right to vote in our state. This package will bring transformational reform to the New York City Board of Elections, making the agency more professional, independent and efficient. Voters across the state would be served by better-trained election officials. We thank Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Elections Committee Chair Senator Zellnor Myrie, and all the bills' sponsors for their work on this legislation. We applaud the Senate for taking steps to improve voting so early in the legislative session, and encourage the Assembly to pass these bills quickly and for Governor Hochul to sign them into law.”

Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of New York State said, “The League of Women Voters of New York State applauds the Senate for continuing its efforts to improve election administration. In recent years, New York has made huge strides forward to improve equity and access to the polls, but we still have a long way to go. We are pleased to see a number of voting rights bills passed including the database to support the New York Voting Rights Act and bills that will increase access to the polls and prohibit voter suppression. The League also strongly supports board of election reforms that would ensure consistent training for all poll workers and improve professionalism and transparency. We urge the Assembly to take similar action to protect voters and the democratic process.”

Christina Harvey, Executive Director for Stand Up America said, “Last year, New York made history by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. Our state Senate is poised to make even more progress this week by passing legislation to remove barriers to voting and keep our elections running smoothly for the people of New York. Our democracy is stronger when everyone can participate in the electoral process and those responsible for administering our elections have the resources and structures they need to set them up for success. Stand Up America applauds Senate leaders for taking up these critical voting rights and election reforms, and calls on the Assembly to follow their lead and prioritize this important legislative package to ensure every New Yorker has a voice.”

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