



MEMO OF SUPPORT

[S1381-A \(Comrie\) / A1722-A \(Zinerman\)](#)

Requires Plain Language in Statewide Ballot Amendments

May 19, 2023

TITLE OF BILL

An act to amend the Election Law, in relation to the form in which a proposed amendment to the constitution or other question provided by law to be submitted to a statewide vote shall be submitted to the people for their approval.

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS¹

Section 1 adds four new subdivisions to Election Law §4-108 requiring that statewide ballot amendments be written in “plain language” for constitutional amendments, and states that amendments must consist only of the following in plain language:

- a. a descriptive title of up to 15 words;
- b. a summary of the proposal in up to 30 words; and
- c. a statement of what a yes or no vote means in up to 30 words.

The bill then provides that the Attorney General can make recommendations on plain ballot language.

The next section outlines a process for writing plain ballot language in which the Board of Elections publishes draft ballot amendments on its website at least four months prior to the general election, and allows for public comment on the language. The bill also establishes guidelines for plain language, such as prohibiting semicolons, as well as a formula for ensuring that the language is at or below an eighth-grade reading level.

Section 2 adds a new §4-116 to Election Law to provide that the State Board of Elections shall publish an abstract of each ballot question no later than two months before the general election.

¹ This Summary of Provisions reflects the Senate version of the bill. The Assembly bill has not yet been amended to match the Senate version.

Section 3 states that the bill takes effect immediately.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

Reinvent Albany supports this bill because we believe that providing voters with clear, simple language allows them to make more informed decisions about how to cast their vote.

According to the US Department of Education, only [48% of Americans](#) can read at a level required to understand “dense, lengthy, or complex texts.” New York is in the [bottom ten](#) for state literacy rates, meaning that complex ballot language is even more challenging for voters.

This bill requires ballot amendments to be written in language no higher than an eighth-grade reading level. This will simplify the voting process and help New Yorkers make more informed decisions at the ballot box.

This bill passed the Senate on May 17, 2023. We urge the Assembly to pass the bill immediately.