

May 11, 2022

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader  
New York State Senate  
172 State Street  
The Capitol, Room 330  
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker  
New York State Assembly  
Legislative Office Building 932  
Albany, NY 12248

**RE: SUPPORT FOR THE JOHN R. LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF NEW YORK  
(S.1046B / A.6678B)**

Dear Governor Hochul, Senate Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

We write to express our strong support for the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (NYVRA). This landmark legislation would root out discrimination against voters of color in New York and immediately make our State a national leader on protecting the right to vote. For these reasons, the NYVRA is a top New York voting rights priority for the undersigned civil and voting rights organizations.

Today, voters of color across the country face the greatest assault on their rights since Jim Crow. During the 2021 legislative sessions, lawmakers in 49 states introduced more than 400 bills that restrict voter access. This onslaught on the right to vote has continued in 2022. Now more than ever, we need New York to stand up for voting rights.

Recent reforms have brought New York closer to becoming an inclusive, multi-racial democracy, but voters of color in the Empire State still face discrimination. There are still persistent barriers to equal participation for New York's voters of color and people whose first language is not

English, particularly at the local level. Too often, unfair district lines, inaccessible polling locations, inadequate language assistance for the estimated 1.2 million eligible New York voters who are not yet fully fluent in English, and even outright voter intimidation deny New York's most underserved communities the opportunity to participate on an equal basis in our democracy. And these issues are compounded by systemic failures in election administration across the state, which the legislature must also address. In fact, New York's voter registration and turnout rates still rank near the bottom nationally—and these rates are even lower for New Yorkers of color.

The NYVRA will set a new standard for protecting the right to vote by:

- Launching a “preclearance” program that requires local governments with records of discrimination to prove that proposed voting changes will not harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Providing new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting provisions in court.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction.
- Instructing state judges to interpret election laws in a pro-voter way whenever possible, so that close questions of legal interpretation are resolved in favor of the rights of qualified voters.
- Establishing a central hub for election data and demographic information that will empower officials and community members to ensure accessible elections.\*

The NYVRA builds upon both the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 as well as successful state laws already passed in California, Washington, Oregon, and Virginia. In addition, legislators in Connecticut have proposed legislation similar to the NYVRA. If passed, the NYVRA will immediately become the most comprehensive state-level voting rights act in the country.

Now is New York's time to lead. We urge you to pass and sign into law the NYVRA, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all New York voters.

Sincerely,

32BJ SEIU

A Little Piece of Light

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Anti-Defamation League | New York/New Jersey

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Betsy Steward Consulting

Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

Brooklyn Voters Alliance

Campaign Legal Center  
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY  
Center for Law & Social Justice at Medgar Evers College  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)  
Citizen Action of New York  
College & Community Fellowship  
Community Service Society of New York  
Community Voices Heard  
Community Votes  
CURE The Coalition for Understanding Racism Through Education  
DemCast USA  
Demos  
Dominicanos USA  
Downstate New York ADAPT  
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance  
Empire State Indivisible  
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund  
FairVote Action  
FPWA  
Generation Vote  
Hope's Door  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
League of Women Voters of New York State  
League of Women Voters of Westchester  
Long Island Area Council of Unitarian Universalist Congregations  
Long Island Center for Independent Living, Inc. (LICIL)  
Long Island Progressive Coalition  
Make the Road NY  
Metro New York Health Care for All  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.  
NAACP of Sullivan County Branch 2187  
National Action Network  
National Association of Social Workers, New York State  
New Hour for Women & Children LI  
New York Civic Engagement Table  
New York Communities for Change  
New York Democratic Lawyers Council  
New York Immigration Coalition  
New York NETWORK Advocates Team

New York Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC-NY)  
New York Civil Liberties Union  
NYPIRG  
Open Buffalo  
Ossining Community Equity Task Force  
Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church Round Table for the Common Good  
People For the American Way  
Pro-Democracy Parents  
Public Citizen  
Reinvent Albany  
Rock the Vote  
Social Activist-Personal  
Stand Up America  
Teestabletalk  
The Workers Circle  
True Blue New York  
United Auto Workers Region 9A  
United Neighborhood Houses  
Up2Us  
VOCAL-NY  
VoteEarlyNY  
Westchester Women's Agenda  
Women Creating Change  
WWA  
YMCA of Greater New York

\* This provision of the NYVRA is to be enacted through companion legislation.