

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

Thursday, January 5, 2023

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader of the New York State Senate
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

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

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

In 2021, we [urged](#) you to bolster New York’s democracy against rising threats. We thank you for the significant steps you took to stand up for voters. Now, after a season of hateful attacks on elections and voting itself, we count on your leadership to further strengthen the laws, oversight, and resources necessary to foster the safe, inclusive, and responsive democracy New Yorkers deserve.

Last year, we witnessed a disturbing increase nationwide in [election denialism](#), [threats](#) against election workers, and [voter intimidation](#). New York was no exception. Voters reported individuals going door-to-door [in search of voter fraud](#). An unsuccessful lawsuit attempted to [throw out](#) ballots that had already been mailed to boards of elections by eligible voters. Meanwhile, [billionaire megadonors](#) and [special-interest super PACs](#), out of touch with voters’ needs, dominated campaign spending.

You have shown inspiring leadership in the face of these challenges. The new [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York](#) (NY VRA) makes our state a [national leader](#) in fighting race-based voter discrimination. The [on-campus poll site requirement](#) has begun to expand ballot access for student voters. These most-recent gains build on progress over several years, including [rights restoration for individuals on parole](#), [pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds](#), [automatic voter registration](#), [early voting](#), and [statewide public campaign financing](#). Together, these advances position New York to be a beacon of free and fair elections. With adequate resources and proper implementation, their impact will be transformative.

But the fight for our democracy is far from over. We must maintain this momentum in 2023. Your support for the below priorities is essential to ensuring that New York is well-equipped for the consequential 2024 elections and to cement the state’s position as a national leader in protecting and strengthening democracy. We ask you, in the coming budget and legislative session to:

Enact the 11-bill board of elections reform package with adequate and reliable state funding: We urge you to reintroduce and enact the [board of elections reform package](#) passed by the Senate last session. The package responds to a [Senate](#) investigation, reinforced by findings from [nonpartisan experts](#), that revealed a statewide election administration system rife with problems, from chronic understaffing and underfunding to inadequate training protocols. If enacted, this package would introduce reforms to local boards of elections grounded in national best practices, including improved training, enhanced transparency, and standardized selection processes for agency leadership. These bills are a first step toward modernizing election administration in New York State and we hope they will mark the beginning of broader improvements to boards of elections. We also urge you to appropriate sufficient funding in the state budget to support local boards of elections, which often struggle to deliver consistent voter service due in part to variable county budgets.

Realize the goals of the NY VRA with the voting and elections database and corresponding funding: We also urge you to enact legislation creating a voting and elections database, similar to the one proposed in [S. 8202](#) last session, which will be key to implementing the NY VRA once it goes into effect in July 2023. By making more comprehensive voting and demographic data available to the public, the database will enable voters, lawmakers, and election administrators to make evidence-based decisions to ensure equitable voting access for New Yorkers. The FY 2023-2024 budget must provide sufficient funding for the NY VRA's existing provisions, as well as the voting and elections database.

Fund the small donor public financing program's historic first cycle: We urge you to secure the future of New York's new small donor public financing program by appropriating the \$100 million for future matching funds and the \$14.5 million for administration requested by the Public Campaign Finance Board for FY 2023-2024. The program is the strongest and most robust legislative response in the nation to counter the megadonor-driven independent expenditures that *Citizens United* unleashed. We applaud you for providing funding for program administration and future matching funds in last year's budget. By providing the program the resources it needs, you will help give more everyday New Yorkers a greater voice and stake in the political process. With the state's transparency and anti-coordination rules, the legal infrastructure is in place to help public financing expand meaningful opportunities for New Yorkers to participate in elections.

Support automatic voter registration implementation: This month, another major legislative accomplishment – automatic voter registration (AVR) – will go into effect at the Department of Motor Vehicles, followed by other state and local agencies over the next two years. We urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that the State Board of Elections has adequate resources to successfully implement AVR, which includes building an online voter registration (OVR) platform that will enable agencies to easily enroll voters. If properly implemented, AVR could result in an increase of as many as [1.1 million](#) registered voters across our state, helping to reduce a key barrier to the ballot box.

Make voter registration and absentee voting more accessible: We applaud you for [reducing New York's voter registration deadline](#) to the state constitutional minimum of ten days before Election Day. This change, if implemented carefully, will create a single “golden day” of same-day registration on the first day of early voting, allowing more eligible New Yorkers to

participate in our democracy. In addition, as we continue to navigate the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we encourage you to extend the explicit definition of temporary illness in relation to absentee voting availability so that no New Yorker must choose between their health and their vote. Successful implementation and administration of these measures will be important foundations for future pro-voter amendments to our state's constitution.

2023 can be a banner year for protecting the rights and voices of New York voters. We look forward to working together to implement and enact voting, elections, and campaign finance reforms that strengthen the people's trust in their elected government.

Sincerely,

504 Democratic Club
Alliance for Quality Education
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Bard College Center for Civic Engagement
Bay Shore Babylon Women's Huddle
Bethlehem Morning Voice Huddle
Bethlehem NY Indivisible
Brennan Center for Justice
Bronx Independent Living Services
Brooklyn NAACP
Brooklyn Resisters
Brooklyn Voters Alliance
CCoHOPE Indivisible
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College
Center for Popular Democracy
Central Queens Independent Democrats (CQuID)
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)
Citizen Action of New York
Citizens Response Network of Wayne County, NY
Citizens Union
Common Cause/NY
Communications Workers of America District 1
Community Voices Heard
Demos
Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (DIA)
Dominicanos USA
Downstate New York ADAPT
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance
East End Action Network (EEAN)
El Puente de Williamsburg
Empire State Indivisible
Fair Elections for New York
Four Freedoms Democratic Club
Future Coalition
Generation Vote

Holland (Willows) Indivisible Group
Indivisible Activate NYC
Indivisible Binghamton
Indivisible Harlem
Indivisible Nation BK
Indivisible Rochester
Indivisible Salt City
Indivisible Scarsdale
Indivisible Ulster
Indivisible Upper East Side
Indivisible Westchester
IndivisibleWeStand UWS
Inwood Indivisible
Larchmont/Mamaroneck Indivisible
League of Women Voters of New York State
 League of Women Voters of Albany County
 League of Women Voters of Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties MAL
 League of Women Voters of Chautauqua
 League of Women Voters of East Nassau
 League of Women Voters of Port Washington-Manhasset
 League of Women Voters of Rensselaer County
 League of Women Voters of Rockland County
 League of Women Voters of Schenectady County
 League of Women Voters of St. Lawrence County, New York
 League of Women Voters of Suffolk County
 League of Women Voters of the City of New York
 League of Women Voters of the North Country
 League of Women Voters of the Rochester Metro Area
 League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metropolitan Area
 League of Women Voters of Tompkins County, New York
 League of Women Voters of Westchester
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Long Islanders for Gun Safety
Make the Road New York
March On
MomsRising Together
NAACP New York State Conference
National Action Network
National Urban League
 Broome County Urban League
 Buffalo Urban League
 Long Island Urban League
 New York Urban League
 Rochester Urban League
 Westchester Urban League
New York Civic Engagement Table

New York Democratic Lawyers Council
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
New York Working Families Party
Planned Parenthood Empire State Acts
Professional Staff Congress-CUNY
Progressive East End Reformers (PEER)
Progressive Schenectady
Putnam Progressives
Reinvent Albany
Stand Up America
The Andrew Goodman Foundation
The Workers Circle
Third Act NYC
Together We Will Long Island
U-ACT (Ulster Activists), Election Reform Committee
United Auto Workers Region 9A
Vote Early New York
Westchester for Change
YMCA of Greater New York