



November 23, 2015

Mr. Alphonso David
Counsel to the Governor
Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo
Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12558

Re: Reforming Constitutional Convention Delegate Selection and Convention Rules

Dear Mr. David:

We write to ask that the Governor introduce legislation consistent with the joint efforts of our groups to reform the process for selecting delegates to a potential state constitutional convention, and ensure that robust transparency, ethics and lobbying rules apply to delegates.

Leading up to the forthcoming public discussion of the 2017 mandatory ballot measure, it is critical that fundamental and long-called-for statutory reforms be enacted as soon as possible. This is a choice of great importance to the voters, and is the only way that voters will be able to directly voice their collective will to change convention processes before the convention may be called. New Yorkers should be assured that key measures have been taken to make a possible convention more open, fair and representative of the state.

The list below is not inclusive of all the reforms that our various groups have supported in the past and may continue to urge in this area. Instead, it focuses on a few important modernizing steps that our groups believe have wide support and agreement, as well as directly addressing some of the significant concerns leading up to the 1997 vote.

- Signature requirements to get on the ballot for convention delegates should be significantly lowered.
- Slate voting for the 15 “at-large” delegates elected statewide should be eliminated and voters should vote for individual candidates.
- State-sponsored voter pamphlets (both in print and electronic form) that provide biographical information on candidates, including their past and current experience as elected officials or government employees, should be provided to voters.
- Current freedom of information, ethics and lobbying rules should be amended as necessary to ensure that they apply to convention delegates.
- While we recognize that the Constitution requires delegates be paid the full annual salary of a state legislator, reforms should be put in place that restrict elected officials from receiving two salaries, and ensure delegates who hold any government position (elected or appointed) cannot use delegate service to enhance pension benefits.

Some of these initiatives require the expenditure of state resources, for example the ballot pamphlet. Thus, we believe that the aforementioned package of reforms could be included in the 2016-17 executive budget plan. If that step is taken, it would ensure that there would be a robust reform debate during the upcoming session.

Such a debate during the 2016 legislative session could both educate the public on the importance of the looming constitutional convention vote in 2017 as well as clear the way for any additional measures during the 2017 session.

It is our view that greater attention should be drawn to the convention to ensure that New Yorkers have an opportunity to make an informed vote in 2017. One way to achieve this heightened public awareness is through the successful passage of reforms to the convention process; the Governor can ensure that delegates to a convention (if approved) would be more representative and that the convention would meet the same standards of openness as other important government processes.

We urge that the Governor support delegate selection reforms in his State of the State address and couple it with legislative reforms.

We would like to schedule a meeting to discuss these reforms in more detail. We will contact your office to determine your availability.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dare Thompson, President
League of Women Voters of NYS

Blair Horner, Executive Director
NYPIRG

Susan Lerner, Executive Director
Common Cause NY

Dick Dadey, Executive Director
Citizens Union

John Kaehny, Executive Director
Reinvent Albany

Larry Norden, Deputy Director
Brennan Center for Justice

Stephen Greenwald
Wagner College