

# *New York Voters Coalition*

**Common Cause/NY ♦ BridgeRoots ♦ Citizens Union  
Chhaya CDC ♦ The Hugh L. Carey Institute for Governmental Reform  
The Latino Leadership Institute  
The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of Women Voters of New York State  
NAACP Mid-Manhattan Branch ♦ New York Immigration Coalition  
TWU Local 100 ♦ Women's City Club of New York**

## **MEMORANDUM**

### **2016-17 Executive Budget Provisions Regarding Voting Reform**

**March 21, 2016**

Our groups support the proposals within Governor Cuomo's 2016-17 Executive Budget legislation which would implement automatic voter registration and early voting in New York State, and urge the New York State Assembly and Senate to consider and pass these legislative proposals.

We believe that elections are the lifeblood of our democracy. We are alarmed, as we are sure you are, by the fact that New York has experienced such low voter turnout – 42nd in voter turnout for the 2012 elections. The early voting and automatic voter registration proposals contained in the Budget, if enacted, would substantially modernize New York's elections and voter registration processes.

#### **I. Early Voting**

##### **Statement of Support**

We support early voting and encourage the New York State Assembly and Senate to include this policy reform in its final budget proposals to ensure that New Yorkers, who will be asked to vote in at least four elections in 2016, have more flexible voting options.

In past elections, including most recently the 2012 election, New York's voters endured Election Day long lines in order to cast a ballot. While dozens of states allow early voting, New York only allows voters who cannot be present on Election Day to cast an absentee ballot if such voter meets designated qualifications.

Including early voting in the Budget will allow all New Yorkers to have the opportunity to have their voice heard without waiting in line for hours. Early voting offers 21st century voters the convenience and flexibility that match the demands of modern life. As discussed in the Brennan Center's report – "Early Voting: What Works," early voting has the added election

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administration benefits of: (i) reducing the stress on the voting system on Election Day; (ii) shortening lines on Election Day; (iii) improving poll worker performance; and (iv) allowing for early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches.

## **Proposed Early Voting Budget Allocation**

Our coalition suggests that the legislature allocate \$5.5 million for Early Voting implementation. Our goal is for the State to support approximately 50% of the counties' expenses associated with the first cycle of early voting to overcome objections based on cost to the counties. Rough estimates by Common Cause/NY and by members of the Assembly Elections Committee both anticipate costs of approximately \$10 million statewide to institute Early Voting. We are happy to share our more detailed analysis with you regarding this point if it would aid [the committee's] consideration.

## **II. Automatic Voter Registration**

### **Statement of Support**

Our coalition supports automatic voter registration (AVR) and encourages the legislature to include this reform in its final budget proposal. Under automatic registration, election officials automatically register all eligible citizens who interact with government offices. This reform leverages two features which should be appealing to New Yorkers: (1) it is paperless and seamless for voters, and (2) it presumes that all eligible citizens should be registered, while allowing those who do not wish to be registered to stay off the rolls. Nobody is registered against their will.

New York already has a system to electronically transfer voter registration information from the Department of Motor Vehicle offices ("DMV") directly to election officials. Automatic registration is the logical next step. It creates a process that is more convenient and less error-prone for voters, government-agency staff, and election officials.

Governor Cuomo's budget proposal only implements automatic registration at the DMV. We respectfully recommend that this provision be expanded to require other government agencies to implement automatic registration, even if such a requirement is phased in over time. At a minimum, this should include other state agencies, and their local affiliates, who are required to conduct voter registration pursuant to the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

By incorporating this change, New York would take a major step towards reforming New York's archaic election laws and help our state regain its reputation as an innovator and forward thinking state. It would ensure that every eligible voter is on the rolls, only eligible voters are on the rolls, and the government takes responsibility to build the rolls and update voters' registration records. It is also worth noting that such a change would have the effect of positioning New York as a leader in automatic registration while adding millions of new voters to the rolls.

### **Proposed Automatic Voting Registration Allocation**

Though we recommend expanding AVR to require other appropriate government agencies, we are confining our budget line recommendations to the DMV. An allocation of \$1 million by the

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legislature to the DMV specifically for implementing AVR throughout New York State would cover additional staff time, training and the necessary changes to the paper and online registration forms. We anticipate a drop in the yearly cost of maintaining AVR to drop once all materials are updated and the program is firmly in place. However, we advise the legislature to study AVR's future yearly cost so that New York State will be best prepared for this needed program.