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## NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE

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### **Historic Legislation Passes NYS Legislature Reforming Absentee Ballot Application**

*New Absentee Ballot Application Minimizes Voter's Invasion of Privacy,  
Eliminates "Traps" That can Invalidate the Ballot*

(April 16, 2010) New York State Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, Member of the Assembly Election Law Committee, and Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr., Chair of the Senate Elections Committee, announced today that their historic legislation, S.2868/A5276, passed both houses of the New York State Legislature and will be delivered to the governor for his approval. This bill simplifies the absentee ballot process for all New Yorkers, no longer requiring a complicated and intimidating explanation from someone who requests an absentee ballot.

This legislation would change the process by which a voter requests an absentee ballot. It allows an absentee ballot to be provided as long as the voter affirms, in good faith, that he or she will be out of the county or unable to appear at their designated polling site on Election Day due to illness or disability. The new absentee ballot application will simply require a sworn statement signed by the voter stating that the voter does not anticipate being able to access their polling site on Election Day for one of those reasons.

Currently voters are asked a series of lengthy questions that provides information of little value to the Board of Elections. These questions not only burden the voters with the complex task of explaining why they cannot appear at the poll site, but invade their privacy and jeopardize their safety by requiring such minute details. These details include the dates that voters will be away from their residences, where they are going, and who they will be with. If voters will be unable to go to the polls due to illness or disability, they must specify their physician's name and address; and if they will be in a hospital, they must disclose where it is located.

In addition, S.2868/A.5276 also allows voters to request absentee ballots for more than one election. Voters who have second residences or go on extended trips are currently forced to apply for absentee ballots for each election, often preventing their participation in elections, such as special elections to fill vacated offices, which could occur within weeks or months of each other. This will allow more people to exercise their right to vote by making it easier for people to vote who are constantly away from their homes and polling sites, and who know they will not be able to vote in person.

"This legislation simplifies the absentee ballot application to ensure that qualified registered voters are free to vote in each and every election without the invasive personal questions that are currently required," said Assemblywoman Sandy Galef (90<sup>th</sup> AD). "These hurdles are unnecessary and disenfranchise people who are not comfortable answering such personal questions. I am delighted that this legislation will change all of that and encourage more people to vote in elections."

"The Elections Committee has made common sense reforms a priority because, under no circumstance, should voters question their role in our democracy," said Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens), Chair of the Senate Elections Committee. "Voters should not be intimidated by an unnecessarily complicated absentee ballot application, or afraid to exercise their right to vote because the application requires them to compromise their safety and security by disclosing when they will be away from their homes or too ill to leave them. This legislation will right that wrong."

"The League of Women Voters of New York State applauds the NYS Legislature for increasing opportunities for eligible New York voters to choose how and when they can exercise their right to vote. This bill simplifies the absentee voting application process for voters by eliminating unnecessary and intrusive personal information from the application form," said Aimee Allaud, Elections Specialist, for the League.

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