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.