



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Iwen Chu

NYS Senator Iwen Chu Introduces Legislation for Absentee Voting for Religious Observations

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New York State Senator Iwen Chu introduced legislation (S8637) to allow for absentee voting in instances where personal religious observation conflicts. Current election law does not allow objections to one's polling location for religious reasons.

Last year, an observant Jewish constituent in Bensonhurst contacted the office of State Senator Iwen Chu regarding her and her neighbors' experience with their polling location for early voting and election day. The assigned location was a site her own personal faith prohibited her to step foot into: a non-Jewish house of worship. The assigned location put the constituent in a place where their ability to vote compromised religious observations.

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One of our most important civic responsibilities is voting in every election and have our voices heard. I truly believe it is our strongest tool as U.S citizens and I take this seriously. New Yorkers with the ability to partake in democracy should be able to exercise their right to vote without any obstacles. After a constituent complained, my office found there were not any mechanisms to change polling place due to sensitivities with religious observances. With this legislation, I'm righting that wrong and giving the ability to New Yorkers of all faiths to practice their right to vote," said NYS Senator Iwen Chu. "The state senate district I

represent is one of the lowest voter enrollment and turnout in New York and I know first-hand how obstacles can impede turnout. I'm committed to removing barriers for communities and empower voters to increase civic participation."

“The right to vote is one of the most fundamental rights of all US citizens. It would be unconscionable to have that right curtailed due to a person’s religious observance or practice. We thank Senator Chu for introducing this commonsense legislation, ensuring that religious observance or practice should never be an obstacle for exercising ones right to vote,” said Rabbi Yeruchim Silber, Director of New York Government Relations at Agudath Israel of America.

Last year the State legislature passed and signed into law to allow “no excuse” absentee voting, however, absentee ballots must be submitted by hand or mail by the last day of early voting. Such restrictions can limit access to vote for some New Yorkers. An Albany Supreme Court Judge upheld the change in February, but it is vulnerable to future court challenges. Senator Chu’s bill will preserve the right to vote absentee for religious observance or practice and provide additional days to return an absentee ballot.