



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

## Senator Michael Gianaris and Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh Call for Universal Voter Registration and Other Reforms

MICHAEL GIANARIS September 24, 2015

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### Proposal Would Enroll More Than 2 Million New Voters in NY State

**NEW YORK** – In the aftermath of National Voter Registration Day, Senator Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) and Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh (D-Manhattan) called for the enactment of their Voter Empowerment Act which would automatically register every eligible citizen to

vote through the Department of Motor Vehicles and other government agencies, only excluding those who affirmatively opt out. This reform would newly register more than **two million** New Yorkers to vote.

In addition to automatically registering eligible consenting citizens, the Voter Empowerment Act would allow voters to automatically update their information, permit pre-registration of 16- and 17- year-olds, automatically transfer registrations of New Yorkers who move within the state, provide access to voter registration records and registration of eligible citizens online, and allow people to register or change their party later in the election cycle.

“There is no good reason why our citizens are made to jump through hoops just to exercise their democratic rights,” said **Senator Michael Gianaris**. “We must do all we can to increase New York’s dismal voter participation rates and automatically registering eligible citizens to vote would be a great start.”

“Our current voter registration system makes it far too difficult for New Yorkers to get themselves registered and get to the polls,” said **Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh**.

“Handwritten forms, data entry errors, arbitrary deadlines, and other defects in the system all too often make it difficult or impossible for voters to vote. The reforms laid out in the Voter Empowerment Act would transform and modernize our voter registration system to make it help rather than hinder the democratic process.”

"Our city, our government, our democracy, work best when everyone participates, but voter turnout in New York has reached historic lows," said **Amy Loprest, Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board**. If we want to make sure more voters show up on Election Day, we need to make sure they are ALL registered. New Yorkers deserve automatic voter registration, let's make sure they get it in 2016!

"Since the 1919, the League of Women Voters of the City of New York has been working to register and educate voters," said **Catherine Gray, Vice President, League of Women Voters of the City of New York**. "We support passage of the Voter Empowerment Act because it will make it easier to register voters and even re-register those who change their names or addresses. The whole process of voting must be as secure, accurate, and transparent as possible."

"On National Voter Registration Day, NYPIRG volunteers registered hundreds of students to vote on college campuses across the city and state," said **Megan Ahearn, Organizing Director for NYPIRG**. "But the real answers to increasing voter rates are reforms that reduce and eliminate the needless barriers to participation at the state level. It's time for the Governor to lead the effort to enact common sense legislation like universal registration that will end New York's embarrassing participation rates."

"New York has among the worst registration rates in the country. Fortunately, we are not stuck there," said **DeNora Getachew, Campaign Manager and Legislative Counsel at the Brennan Center**. "Our legislators can pass the Voter Empowerment Act, and can register eligible voters automatically. New Yorkers deserve modern and effective registration systems."

“National Voter Registration Day should be of particular importance to New Yorkers. Our state has the unfortunate distinction of ranking 44<sup>th</sup> in voter participation. This is not because New Yorkers are lazy. Voter participation is low in this state because our processes by which we register to vote and cast our ballots in New York have not kept up with the changing times in which we live,” said **Josh Mumm, Outreach Manager for Common Cause New York**. “Advances such as early voting and same day registration are very popular across the country – and we need them here as well. Even simple measures, such as pre-registration of 16 and 17 year-olds, seem to go nowhere in Albany. We’ve worked with Senator Gianaris on these issues in the past, and are encouraged to have him as an ally in our efforts to increase voter participation in New York.”

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