



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Senate Democrats Announce Resistance Agenda to Protect and Improve Voting in New York

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS February 6, 2017

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Albany, NY - The Senate Democratic Conference today released a comprehensive legislative package that would increase New Yorkers' voting protections and access to the polls. Additionally, the Democratic Conference's Policy Group released an accompanying report highlighting the shocking state of voting in New York. The Senate Democratic Conference pointed to the fact that the Trump administration has falsely attacked the electoral process.

On the state level, the Senate Republican Majority has repeatedly blocked efforts to ensure voters' rights are protected, ease access to voting, and have actually worked to suppress the vote in New York State.

"New York State ranks abysmally low on voter turnout, and that is the direct result of generations of Senate Republican red tape and voting disenfranchisement," Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. "I have seen first-hand the lengths those in power will go to maintain their control, even if that means denying New Yorkers their constitutional right to vote. That is why my Senate Democratic colleagues and I are committed to cutting through the bureaucracy and roadblocks and opening up the electoral process to more New Yorkers. Our democracy requires active participation from all citizens and efforts to block that goal are un-American and counter to New York values."

Senate Democratic Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris said, "The assault on voting rights around this country has damaged our democracy and has disenfranchised millions of Americans. As the author of the Voter Empowerment Act, we should be doing all we can to increase dismal voter participation rates and have a process that encourages, rather than discourages, increased voter participation."

Senate Democratic Policy Group Chair Daniel Squadron said, "At a time when basic American values are under attack, it's critical that New York lead the way in ensuring voters can exercise their rights. As Chair of the Democratic Policy Group we've highlighted shocking facts about New York's voting laws that the Democratic Conference is fighting to reform. Thank you to Leader Stewart-Cousins, Deputy Leader Gianaris, members of the Democratic Policy Group and my colleagues."

The report issued by the Senate Policy Group, "7 Shocking Facts About New York's Voting Laws," illustrates the need for action. The five facts are:

Fact #1: New York's voter turnout is among nation's worst.

Fact #2: New York is 1 of 13 States that denies early voting to its citizens.

Fact #3: New York has blocked the most effective reform to increase voter turnout.

Fact #4: New York's voter registration systems are relics of the last century.

Fact #5: New York's party enrollment rule is the worst in the country.

Fact #6: New York law mandates an astonishing number of primaries.

Fact #7: New York thwarts young people's voter registration.

You can read the full report and analysis

here: <https://www.scribd.com/document/338555295/7-Shocking-Facts-About-New-York-s-Voting-Laws>

The Senator Democratic Conference's Resistance Agenda package includes:

Deceptive Practices and Voter Suppression Act – Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

Early Voting – Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

Consolidation of Federal and State Primaries – Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

The Voter Empowerment Act – Senator Gianaris

Constitutional Amendment to Repeal 10-Day Voter Registration Requirement – Senator

Gianaris

Expansion of Affidavit Voting – Senator Dilan

Reduce Restrictions on Affidavit Voting – Senator Comrie

Board of Elections Feasibility Study – Senator Krueger

Prohibiting Election Districts from Being Split On and Off Campus – Senator Parker

Voter Modernization Act – Senator Parker

Party Enrollment Reform – Senator Squadron

Bill Sponsor and Ranking Member of the Senate Elections Committee, Senator Leroy Comrie said, “As ranking member on the Senate Committee for Elections, my focus is to make the ballot more accessible. Reducing the restrictive requirements for affidavit voting is one of the many ways by which we can give a voice to disenfranchised New Yorkers and strengthen our democracy.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Martin Malavé Dilan said, “Anything that doesn’t improve voter access suppresses it. There is no reason to object to any one of these bills in principle. If you did, it’s likely you’re hoping to exploit the obstacles they present New York voters. Given today’s political climate, we can’t afford any vulnerabilities that endanger the basic right to vote.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Liz Krueger said, “The right to vote is one of the most fundamental freedoms belonging to every American. But Donald Trump and his lackeys at the federal and state level have made clear that they want to take this freedom away, making it harder and harder to cast a ballot. New York voters deserve free, fair, and accessible elections, and Senate Republicans must not stand in the way of passing these critical bills. Anything less is simply un-American.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Kevin Parker said, “It is imperative that we move towards improving the voting process for the residents of New York State. We must work to pass legislation that includes a modernized process by automating voter registration, permitting same day registration, and allowing registration through the internet. The proposed legislation will not only protect voters but also make the process more efficient.”

Senator Neil Breslin said, “The core of our democracy is founded upon fair and open elections which is why it is critical that we modernize New York’s antiquated voting laws. This legislative package the Senate Democratic Conference is advancing will make voting easier while ensuring voter’s rights are protected.”

Senator John Brooks said, “Government can never truly represent the people if citizens don’t have the opportunity to have their voices heard at the voting booth. It is important that we make voting as openly accessible as possible. As our most sacred and fundamental right as Americans, voting should be made easier, not harder. The more options we provide for Americans to vote, the more representative our government will be of the people.”

Senator Brad Hoylman said, “It’s astounding that over 30 million Americans voted early in 2016, but not one New Yorker. It’s far past time we reformed our state’s voting system to make it easier to vote. The tens of thousands of New Yorkers taking to the street in weekly protests are watching. Albany must deliver.”

Senator Todd Kaminsky said, “New York is supposed to be a nationwide leader, but in the certificate area of voting and access to the ballot, it’s sadly ranks near the bottom of all 50 states. It is time we come out of the dark ages, implement modern technology and allow greater access to the ballot for the millions of New Yorkers who wish to be involved in our democracy.”

Senator Tim Kennedy said, “All too often, we hear stories from people in Western New York and across New York State who want to get out to vote and exercise their right as Americans, but are hampered by arcane election laws that actually hinder voter participation rather than encourage it. Throughout the election season, voters are often drawn to the person they feel is the best candidate to represent them – but are then forced to jump through hoops to have a voice, and many times they end up shut out of the process altogether. At its core, this is a bipartisan issue; it has nothing to do with who you’re voting for, and everything to do with how accessible your right to vote should be.”

Senator Velmanette Montgomery said, “I stand in full support of the Senate Democratic Conference’s Resistance Agenda to Protect and Improve Voting in New York. In a democracy,

there is nothing more sacred than the right of the people to vote for their representatives. It is our responsibility to ensure the electoral system increases access for eligible voters and encourages participation. This agenda will bring us closer to our goal.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera said, “For too many years, Senate Republicans have purposely placed roadblocks preventing an overdue reform of our State’s electoral system. Therefore, I’m proud to stand with my colleagues of the Senate Democratic Conference as we unveil a comprehensive legislative agenda that aims to implement common sense measures that will not only save taxpayers millions of dollars but more importantly, will ensure that more New Yorkers participate in our democratic process.”

Senator James Sanders Jr. said, “New York has fallen short in key voting related areas and we must catch up, especially when it comes to things like early voting, increasing voter turnout, and updating voter registration systems. I fully support this latest set of bills, which aim to increase voter protections and accessibility. In a democracy, it is critically important that every voice has a chance to be heard.”

#### **ADDITIONAL LEGISLATION INFO:**

##### **Early Voting** – Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

Establishes an “Early Voting” system to permit eligible voters in New York State to vote in person during a designated period prior to any primary, special, or general election day.

##### **Deceptive Practices and Voter Suppression Act** – Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

Creates a new electoral crime of voter suppression, punishable as a misdemeanor.

##### **Consolidation of Federal and State Primaries** – Senate Democratic Leader Stewart-Cousins

Would save tax payer dollars and make state primary elections the same day as federal primary elections.

Also ensures that New York State's election law complies with the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act.

**The Voter Empowerment Act – Senator Gianaris**

Creates a modern voter registration system that will reduce costs for processing voter registrations and maintaining complete and accurate voter registration lists. This legislation would also reduce the inaccuracy and disenfranchisement that occurs because of human error while also helping prevent fraud.

Provides for automating voter registration of eligible consenting citizens at designated government agencies, permitting the pre-registration of sixteen and seventeen year-olds; transferring the registrations of New Yorkers who move within the state, providing for access to voter registration records and the registration of eligible citizens over the Internet, and moving the deadlines for voter registration and party enrollment.

**Constitutional Amendment to Repeal 10-Day Voter Registration Requirement – Senator Gianaris**

This concurrent resolution amends section 5 of article 2 of the constitution to eliminate the ten day advance voter registration requirement. If adopted, the legislature would set guidelines for this provision.

**Expansion of Affidavit Voting – Senator Dilan**

Allows for the casting and counting of ballots by voters, otherwise eligible, when the voter appears at the wrong Election District but within the proper county.

**Reduce Restrictions on Affidavit Voting – Senator Comrie**

Eliminates the requirement to include previous registration address when applying for an affidavit ballot. The bill also adds language that requires a voter to substantially comply with the law regarding the form and filing of affidavits and affidavit ballots.

### **Board of Elections Feasibility Study –Senator Krueger**

Requires that the New York State Board of Elections do a study of the feasibility of voting by mail, telephone and/or over the internet. This legislation would also empower the Board of Elections to establish pilot programs to evaluate the feasibility of any of these methods of voting.

### **Prohibiting Election Districts from being Split On and Off Campus – Senator Parker**

Prohibits election districts being drawn in such a way that they are partly on and partly off a college or university campus or other contiguous college or university property with 300 or more registered voters, excluding inactive voters. It would also require that the poll sites for election districts serving such concentrations of college or university voters shall be on the campus or college or university property, or at a site approved by the college or university.

### **Voter Modernization Act – Senator Parker**

Provides for automated voter registration of eligible consenting citizens at designated government agencies; permitting same day registration on the day of an election and to cast a vote in such election; allowing for voter registration through the internet; and the updating of registration information through the internet.

### **Party Enrollment Reform – Senator Squadron**

Changes of enrollment would take effect twenty-five (25) days after such changes were applied for. This new time frame would coincide with the deadlines for voter registration thus simplifying the process for both voters and county boards of elections.

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Jennifer L. Clark, Counsel for the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said, “Voting in New York should be as simple as possible, but our outdated system makes it



difficult for many to even get registered. Our state needs to lead the way in election reform, not be at the back of the pack. The reforms offered here today would go a great way toward making that possible. Automatic voter registration has the potential to add a million eligible New Yorkers to the rolls, and implementing it at agencies beyond the DMV would make our state a nationwide leader. And, making sure our state protects voters from suppression at the polls is essential at a time when national trends point in the direction of less protection for voting rights. The Brennan Center urges lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to work together to give New Yorkers elections that are free, fair, and accessible to all.”

Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director for the League of Women Voters NYS, said, “New York State has its version of voter suppression, they are the barriers voters must overcome to exercise their right to vote. We applaud the Senate Democratic conference for putting forward reforms that could bring New York in line with much of the rest of the country. New York ranks at the bottom for voter turnout, these measures will increase voter turnout and should get support to pass quickly.”

Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director, said, “New York’s woeful participation rates are worsened by state laws that create obstacles to voting. New York needs a sweeping response; one that modernizes state voting laws with an eye toward making participation easier, not harder.”

John Kaehny, Executive Director of Reinvent Albany, said, “Reinvent Albany strongly supports efforts to reduce barriers to voting and to create fair and actively contested elections. We hope these bills are voted on by the full senate and assembly. Voting is what makes New York’s democracy great and renews the people’s confidence in government.”

Jessica Wisneski, Legislative and Campaigns Director, Citizen Action of NY, said, “It’s critical that New York State simplify voting so that more New Yorkers participate in our democracy

and make their voices heard. The bills announced today by the Senate Democrats are an important step forward in reforming our voting rules so that everyone has an equal say.”

32BJ President Hector Figueroa said, “Democrats in Albany are introducing vital legislation that will expand voting rights and ensure we have real democracy. We need to break down the barriers that keep New Yorkers from casting their vote and making their voices heard. This is good for our state and good for our country.”

The New York Democratic Lawyers Council issued the following statement: “We applaud Senate Democrats for introducing a robust and much-needed election reform package to overhaul New York’s antiquated voter registration and election administration system. This past November, the fundamental voting rights of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers were infringed when they were expected to vote on a single day. City residents encountered two-and-a-half-hour lines that snaked down sidewalks and around blocks. Prior to the election, harsh early deadlines, grossly negligent voter purges, and manual, paper-based registration served as hurdles to participation, suppressing turnout among perfectly eligible voters. That’s why these pro-voter reforms are so critical—the quality of our democracy depends on it.”