



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

## Senate Democratic Majority Advances Automatic Voter Registration System, Strengthens Voting Rights And Protections

VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY July 22, 2020

| ISSUE: **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19, EMPOWERING VOTERS, AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION**

For Immediate Release: July 22, 2020

Contact: Gary Ginsburg | [ginsburg@nysenate.gov](mailto:ginsburg@nysenate.gov) | 518-455-2415

## **Senate Democratic Majority Advances Automatic Voter Registration System, Strengthens Voting Rights And Protections**

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today passed major voting reforms, including the implementation of an automatic voter registration (AVR) system. Additional voting protection bills were advanced to address concerns raised during the most recent elections due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This legislative package builds on [previous legislation passed](#) to [strengthen and expand](#) New Yorkers' voting rights.

“Voting access is one of the core foundations of our democracy,” **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “Making the voter registration process easier, the early voting process run smoother, and the absentee voting process more effective are all common sense ways to help voters have their voices heard. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that no New Yorkers feel pressured to put their health and well-being at risk to exercise their Constitutional right to vote. I thank the bill sponsors for advancing this legislation, and my Senate Democratic Majority colleagues for their ongoing commitment to empower New York voters.”

The bills that will be advanced by the Senate Majority include:

- Senate Bill [S.8806](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, will implement the New York Automatic Voter Registration Act of 2020 and create an automatic voter registration system through qualified New York State government agencies and departments.
- Senate Bill [S.8370B](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, will give voters notice of any deficiencies in their absentee ballot envelopes and an opportunity to fix them to ensure their votes can be counted.
- Senate Bill [S.8015D](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Alessandra Biaggi, will define the term “illness” for the purposes of absentee voting to include instances where a voter is unable to appear personally at a polling place because there is a risk of contracting or spreading a disease-causing illness to the voter or to other members of the public.
- Senate Bill [S.8799A](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris, temporarily provides that any absentee ballot shall be presumed to be timely even if it does not bear a dated postmark if such ballot was received and timestamped by the day after Election Day.

- Senate Bill [S.8783A](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, temporarily allows the processing of absentee ballot applications prior to 30 days before the election.
- Senate Bill [S.6886D](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator James Skoufis, will require electors to vote for the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidate who received the highest number of votes in the state.
- Senate Bill [S.8796A](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, temporarily allows certain party designations and nominations to be made via video teleconference.
- Senate Bill [S.8465A](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator John Liu, will clarify that the use of alternate, anglicized or familiar names on election petitions and ballots is acceptable provided that such name is demonstrated to be commonly used to identify that person in the person's community and that the use of such name is not intended to mislead voters or petition signers.
- Senate Bill [S.8782](#): This legislation, sponsored by Senator Neil Breslin, will require that in each county, the municipality with the largest population contain at least one early voting location.

**Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris** said, "While national efforts to establish more roadblocks to voting increase, it is critical we make it as easy as possible for all New Yorkers to exercise their right to vote. With approximately 2 million eligible voters not currently on the rolls, automatic registration will make a huge difference in increasing our state's voter participation. Improving the absentee ballot process will also ensure that fewer votes are lost for technical reasons."

**Chair of the Elections Committee and Bill Sponsor, Senator Zellnor Myrie** said, "From the moment this majority entered the Senate and passed a package of major voting reforms like

early voting, we have continually improved and expanded voting rights in New York. Now, following the first primary election during COVID and the expanded use of absentee voting, these bills will begin the work of adjusting our elections to the new reality and ensuring the right to vote remains protected now and in future elections.”

**Bill Sponsor, Senator Alessandra Biaggi** said, “No New Yorker should ever have to choose between safeguarding their health and fulfilling their civic duty. Yet, during the June primary election far too many voters received their absentee ballots too late, or not at all, and had to put their health on the line to make their voices heard. COVID-19 has created unparalleled challenges for safe and fair elections that will likely still exist come the consequential election in the fall. By codifying the expansion of absentee ballot voting, we can provide indisputable clarity now on how New Yorkers can safely access the ballot box in November, and give the Board of Elections the time they need to properly prepare for elections throughout the course of this pandemic. I extend my deepest gratitude to Senate Majority Leader Andrea-Stewart Cousins and my colleagues for their partnership to move this bill over the finish line. I look forward to the Governor signing this legislation into law as quickly as possible to ensure the protection of our democracy.”

**Bill Sponsor, Senator Neil Breslin** said, “In 2019, New York state lawmakers took historic steps in approving a series of voting reforms intended to make New York's voting process easier, more efficient, more transparent, and more accountable to its citizens. Among these reforms were requirements to establish 10 days of early voting which includes two full weekends prior to elections. Early voting provides flexibility and a longer voting process that encourages civic involvement by New York's citizens. This bill will ensure that the most populated municipality in each county has at least one early voting site to further improve voter turnout.”

**Bill Sponsor, Senator John Liu** said, “Earlier this year, two Muslim women from Queens were kicked off the ballot for using common names they are widely known by both personally and professionally, rather than their given names under which they registered to vote. This unjust rule disproportionately prevents diverse candidates from running for office.

Thankfully, the courts reinstated these candidates, and going forward, this bill fixes that undemocratic practice once and for all. Candidates should be able to run for office using names they are commonly known by in their communities, as long as they do not intend to mislead or confuse voters -- just like men with nicknames like ‘Bill,’ ‘Marty,’ and ‘Tony’ have done for years.”

**Bill Sponsor, Senator James Skoufis** said, “Until we can repeal or bypass the Electoral College in favor of a national popular vote, New York’s 29 electoral votes ought to be awarded to our state’s winning candidate. In 2016 alone, we saw seven faithless electors, a number so large it would have tipped three presidential elections in our nation’s history. We can’t allow that to happen in 2020. Along with my colleagues’ election reform bills, this legislation will ensure New Yorkers are able to more easily register to vote, cast a ballot, and ensure their voice is reflected in our democracy.”

**Bill Sponsor, Senator Toby Ann Stavisky** said, “Amending our voting laws to help keep New Yorkers safe, without jeopardizing our electoral process is extremely important. We know that gathering in close proximity is irresponsible during this COVID-19 pandemic. However, under the current election law, nominations and designations are not allowed to be handled via video teleconference. This measure provides the flexibility that will allow governing officials to continue to perform their duties, while limiting the possible spread of the coronavirus. All of these election reform bills will promote safety and emphasize our democratic principles.”

Follow on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/NYSenDems>

New York State Senate | [senatedemocraticmajority@nysenate.gov](mailto:senatedemocraticmajority@nysenate.gov) | 518-455-2415