



March 7, 2011

Senator Libous,

Last week, 25 members of the Senate Democratic Conference sought to keep their promise for reform by co-sponsoring the centerpiece of Governor Andrew Cuomo's agenda to clean up Albany: the Redistricting Reform Act of 2011. Unfortunately, our requests were denied, preventing any bipartisan effort to advance this critical legislation.

Denying members the opportunity to co-sponsor legislation they support is a misinterpretation of Senate Rules and allows for the suppression of legislation even if it is supported by a majority of senators.

When recently debating education legislation on the Senate floor, Education Chair John Flanagan said, "There will probably be a number of disagreements along the way but I think we don't meet our obligation if we don't start by discussing some of that, whether it be in committee or on the floor." I could not agree more with the sentiment expressed by my colleague.

Even though the Republican Majority chose to send the Governor's legislation to the Rules Committee where it can anonymously avoid public oversight, the Majority has a second chance to stand on the side of reform by complying with the rules of the Senate which state that one-third of the membership of a committee may petition for a public hearing on legislation:

Senate Rule VII, Section 4(e): Petition for a public hearing on a bill. By a petition of one-third of the members assigned to a committee rounded up to the nearest whole number, a public hearing shall be scheduled on a specific bill or number of bills within the jurisdiction of a committee, unless the majority of members of the committee reject such petition. Such petitions shall be submitted to the clerk of the committee for presentation at the next committee meeting. Public hearings scheduled by petition will be held at least 14 days following the committee meeting at which it was considered.

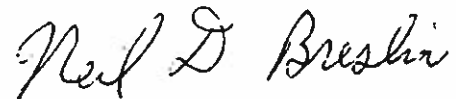
Based on the 24-person membership of the Rules Committee, a petition from eight members automatically triggers a hearing. Therefore, I respectfully submit all 11 Democratic Conference members on the Rules Committee seek immediate action on our request for a public hearing.

A public hearing will guarantee the oversight, transparency, and accountability this critical legislation deserves. Additionally, convening a public hearing will allow members who have voiced concern with the Governor's bill an opportunity to discuss those concerns in an open forum.

Last fall, every Senate Republican signed the NY Uprising pledge to support independent redistricting, including all 13 Republican members of the Senate Rules Committee. I invite their support on this petition.

Governor Cuomo has taken the first step toward keeping his commitment to reform by introducing this legislation. Now, it is up to the Senate to do the same by holding a public hearing that will give the Governor's bill the fair, open and honest consideration necessary to advance redistricting reform before the opportunity for real change is lost for another 10 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil D Breslin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "N" and "B".

Senator Neil Breslin
Deputy Democratic Leader