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## NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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# Senate Majority To Build On Election Reforms And Further Empower New York Voters

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority will advance legislation to improve New York State’s electoral system, allow for portable polling locations, expand ballot drop-off locations, establish the New York Voting and Elections Database, allow food and non-alcoholic drinks to voters waiting in line at the polls, and establish voter suppression as a criminal offense. These actions continue the Senate Democratic Majority’s tradition of kicking off Session by passing major pro-voter, anti-disenfranchisement, pro-democracy legislation. The bills passed by the Senate Majority build on the historic reforms passed during the [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#), and [2022](#) legislative sessions.

“I’m proud of the tradition we’ve started as a Senate Majority to have our first day of session improve our democratic process and pay homage to the voters of this state who have elected us to these positions,” **Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “I’m proud to be the sponsor of legislation today that will make voter suppression a criminal offense. While sometimes voter suppression occurs subtly, oftentimes the effort is much more pronounced and widespread. Disenfranchisement can not exist in New York, and my bill, along with the other important pieces of legislation being passed today will continue to modernize our electoral system and create a fairer and more transparent system.”

**Bill sponsor and Chair of the Elections Committee, Senator Zellnor Myrie** said, “Once again, the Senate Majority’s first order of business for the year is passing bills to make voting easier and protect our rights. This has become an annual tradition for us: not because it benefits one party or the other, but because it is the right thing to do for our democracy. As Elections Committee Chair, I am proud to help lead New York’s journey from #WorstToFirst and I look forward to these bills passing both houses and becoming law.”

The voting reforms being passed by the Senate Democratic Majority, include:

- **Electoral Crime of Voter Suppression:** This bill, [S.263](#), sponsored by Senator Stewart-Cousins, prohibits deceptive practices and the suppression of voters, and increases penalties for violations of the elective franchise.

- **Portable Polling Locations for Early Voting:** This bill, [S.242](#), sponsored by Senator Rachel May, amends the election law to allow counties the option to establish portable polling places for early voting.
- **Absentee Ballot Drop-off Box Locations:** This bill, [S.610](#), sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman, allows local Board of Elections to establish absentee ballot drop-off locations to provide voters with a convenient alternative option to submit their absentee ballots.
- **New York Voting and Elections Database:** This bill, [S.657](#), sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, establishes the New York voting and elections database and institute to maintain a statewide database of voting and election data.
- **Refreshments at the polls:** This bill, [S.616](#), sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, allows snacks and non-alcoholic drinks to be given to voters waiting in line at the polls.
- **Restricts Forum Shopping:** This bill, [S.350](#), sponsored by Senator Robert Jackson, restricts forum shopping for constitutional challenges to election laws. Currently, it is far too easy for those seeking to destabilize the elections process through frivolous litigation. This bill aims to reduce and prevent these attempts to destabilize the election process.

**Bill sponsor, Senator Brad Hoylman** said, “It’s time that New York catches up with the 23 other states across the country that make it easier to submit absentee ballots through the use of drop boxes. This is important because in the June 2020 primaries, at least one in five absentee ballots from New York City were invalidated relating to the mail-in process. Our bill (S610) would permit drop boxes where voters can easily and conveniently return their absentee ballots and help ensure every vote is counted. I’m grateful to Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for continuing to prioritize legislation that protects our democracy.”

**Bill sponsor, Senator Robert Jackson** said, “As a priority of the Senate Majority, we start the legislative session for the new year determined to pass legislation that makes voting easier and safeguards the rights of all New Yorkers. This voting rights package includes a bill I sponsored that protects our democracy by preventing manipulation of the legal system when frivolous lawsuits are filed to overturn Election Law. This package of bills is a crucial step towards strengthening our democracy and ensuring that every vote counts in our state. By supporting this package, we are taking meaningful action to protect the integrity of our elections. I look forward to these bills passing and becoming law.”

**Bill sponsor, Senator Rachel May** said, “Our democracy works best when everyone participates, and it is our job as Legislators to make that participation as easy as possible. This includes giving New Yorkers easier access to the ballot box, and my portable polling locations bill will do just that. It allows counties to remove barriers to early voting by bringing the polling places right to residents’ neighborhoods. The Democratic majority has made improving voting rights a top priority, and I look forward to continuing our effort by passing this important voting reform package.”

**Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY** said, “The Senate Democrats continue to prioritize democracy with a Day One package of important reforms. Common Cause/NY is particularly pleased to see legislation allowing New Yorkers to more easily vote either absentee or in-person depending on their preferences, by establishing ballot drop-boxes and the right to provide snacks for those waiting in-line. Senate Democrats have consistently advanced critical voter access laws, and we urge the Assembly and Governor to do the same.”

**Perry Grossman, Director of the Voting Rights Project at the New York Civil Liberties Union** said, “Continued improvement to our state’s democracy is contingent on policymakers, scholars, and the public having easy, equitable access to voting and election data. Serving as a critical companion to the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York—the strongest and most comprehensive state law of its kind—the New York Voting and Elections Database and Institute will ensure that we can make evidence-based decisions that bolster New Yorkers’ access to the ballot box.”

**L. Joy Williams, President of Brooklyn NAACP and Legislative Director for the NAACP New York State Conference of Branches** said, “While the right to vote is under siege in many states across the country, we applaud the Senate for continuing to make voting rights a priority in New York State. We look forward to the continued partnership and advocacy to get these bills passed and signed into law.”

**Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of New York State** said, “The League of Women Voters of New York State applauds the Senate for continuing its efforts to improve election administration. In recent years, New York has made huge strides forward to improve equity and access to the polls, but we still have a long way to go. We are pleased to see a number of voting rights bills passed including the database to support the New York Voting Rights Act and bills that will increase access to the polls and prohibit voter suppression. The League also strongly supports board of election reforms that would ensure consistent training for all poll workers and improve professionalism and transparency. We urge the Assembly to take similar action to protect voters and the democratic process.”

**Jarret Berg, Co-Founder and Voting Rights Counsel at Vote Early New York** said, “With American democracy facing challenges both at home and abroad, New Yorkers are incredibly fortunate to have State Senate leadership that is focused on protecting and advancing our voting rights. We applaud the Senate Majority for once again putting fundamental rights first--by prioritizing this critical package of nearly twenty pro-civic election reform measures--and look forward to working with lawmakers in both chambers to enact modern voting policies that improve the fairness and quality of our elections.”

**Derek Perkinson, Crisis Director and NYS Field Director for National Action Network** said, “History will judge what we do to protect voting rights. We are calling on our state’s leaders to shine during dark times and strengthen our voting rights and our democracy by passing this package of voting rights and election reform bills. The right to vote is our most fundamental right and is the right upon which all our other rights rest. We all stand upon the shoulders of people who died to achieve and protect this precious right. We must build upon the John R. Lewis NY Voting Rights Act. All voters should be able to cast their ballot freely and safely. This package will ensure election deniers and election cheaters cannot and will not ever prosper in the great state of New York.”

**Joanna Zdanys, senior counsel in the Elections and Government Program at the Brennan Center for Justice** said, “This legislative package is a vital step forward for New York’s democracy. It will bring proven best practices from around the country to improve the professionalism, transparency, and voter service of New York’s boards of elections. We are also pleased to see the Senate build on the promise of the historic John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York by passing additional pro-voter reforms, including establishing the New York voting and elections database and allowing voters braving long lines to receive food and drink. We applaud the Senate for passing this package and commend Senate Majority

Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Elections Chair Zellnor Myrie, and the bills' sponsors for their leadership in the effort to help New York become the inclusive democracy it can and should be."

**Christina Harvey, Executive Director for Stand Up America** said, "Last year, New York made history by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. Our state Senate is poised to make even more progress this week by passing legislation to remove barriers to voting and keep our elections running smoothly for the people of New York. Our democracy is stronger when everyone can participate in the electoral process and those responsible for administering our elections have the resources and structures they need to set them up for success. Stand Up America applauds Senate leaders for taking up these critical voting rights and election reforms, and calls on the Assembly to follow their lead and prioritize this important legislative package to ensure every New Yorker has a voice."

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