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## NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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**For Immediate Release:** May 31, 2022

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# Senate Majority to Pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York

*And additional legislation that will make New York a beacon of democracy.*

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today will advance the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York in its latest effort to strengthen voter protections and enhance democracy in the state of New York. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York will enact the most robust voter protections at any state level in the United States and provide legal recourse for denying or abridging any individual's right to vote. This law is named for the late civil rights activist and American statesman Rep. John R. Lewis, who spent his entire life protecting and expanding the right to vote. His work in Congress paved the way for better representation across America and raised the standard for greater democratic participation. Today's additional measures build on his legacy by prohibiting deceptive and suppressive voter practices, establishing a voting and elections database, and making electronic election interference a misdemeanor crime.

2021 ushered in one of the most regressive years in recent history for voting rights in other parts of America, with over 440 bills introduced in 49 states designed to restrict the vote. Simultaneously, the Supreme Court declined to uphold VRA anti-discrimination standards in the case of two Arizona voter restriction laws, further eroding federal protections following the Shelby County decision that had eviscerated federal pre-clearance. These measures disproportionately affect Black and Brown Americans and are wielded to keep specific demographic groups away from the polls. The Senate Majority is standing up to these oppressive trends by keeping voting rights strong and elections free in the State of New York.

**Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said, "The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York and the additional voting rights legislation being passed, one of which I am proud to sponsor, will expand and codify voter protections, empower citizens at the ballot box, and promote accountability among elected officials. I am proud that New York is standing as a true bastion of voting rights despite the anti-democratic rollbacks being set forth by Republicans across the nation. I thank the bill sponsors, Chair of the Elections Committee, Senator Myrie, and Senator Kaplan for joining me in our collective efforts to continue supporting the Democratic Majority's advocacy on this issue."

**Senator Zellnor Myrie, bill sponsor and Chair of the Senate Elections Committee** said, "John Lewis said that to preserve democracy, 'each generation must do its part.' By adopting the strongest voter protection law of any state in the country, today the Senate Majority is doing its part. While states across the country have worked overtime to restrict voting rights, the New York VRA will strengthen protections for all voters, especially those who have historically been disenfranchised. The right to vote protects every other right we have, and I look forward to the VRA becoming the law of the land here in New York State."

The legislation being passed by the Senate Majority includes:

- **The Rep. John Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York:** This bill, S1046E, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, establishes rights of actions for denying or abridging the right of any member of a protected class to vote, provides assistance to language-minority groups, and requires preclearance of certain voting policies for a select group of jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination.
- **Act to Penalize Voter Deception and Suppression:** This bill, S1032, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, prohibits deceptive practices and the suppression of voters, and increases penalties for those who deceive voters or threaten their right to vote.
- **Establishing the New York Voting and Elections Database:** This bill, S8202, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, regulates public data maintained by county and city boards of elections and establishes the New York voting and elections database and institute to maintain a statewide database of voting and election data.
- **Preventing Electronic Interference:** This bill, S118, sponsored by Senator Anna Kaplan establishes the misdemeanor of interfering in the election process by electronic means.

**Bill sponsor Senator Anna Kaplan** said, "We've worked hard here in New York to advance voting rights and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to have their voice heard at the ballot box, but unfortunately there are always bad actors diligently working to suppress the vote and undermine our efforts. Technology has opened up a whole new world of sophisticated voter suppression tools, and we need to stay a step ahead of the bad guys if we're going to protect our democracy from these new forms of attack. I'm proud to sponsor legislation to criminalize high-tech election interference, and I'm grateful for the leadership of Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins in prioritizing the passage of this important package of legislation that will strengthen our right to vote and protect our democracy."

**L. Joy Williams, President of Brooklyn NAACP and Legislative Director for the NAACP New York State Conference of Branches** said, "The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York represents hope for New Yorkers of color who are entitled to an equal opportunity to hold local government officials accountable at the ballot box. I commend the steadfast leadership of Senator Zellnor Myrie and Assemblymember Latrice Walker along with Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie in making sure New York State leads the country by passing the strongest and most comprehensive state voting rights act to date, with the nation's first state pre clearance program. This historic vote comes at a time when leadership from elected officials on voting rights is desperately needed and provides a roadmap for our colleagues in other states fighting for voting rights that change is possible."

**Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY** said, “Once again, the New York State Senate is leading the way and prioritizing election reform with the Voting Rights Package passed today. The Voting Rights Act, as well as the banning of all-in-one machines — which are wasteful, insecure and deeply flawed — is precedent setting, making New York a national leader. Now, the Assembly must pass this same package and secure the right to vote.”

**Perry Grossman, Supervising Attorney, Voting Rights Project, New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)** said, “Voting rights are under attack around the country and, in the absence of federal leadership, New York has the blueprint for fair and just elections. Today, by passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York, Senate lawmakers made an enormous stride toward ensuring communities that have historically been denied an equal opportunity to participate in the political process can cast a meaningful ballot — without obstruction, interference, or discrimination, and we urge the Assembly to follow their lead. We’re also immensely grateful that the Senate passed a bill today establishing the New York Voting and Elections Database, which creates a vital resource to diagnose and cure inequities in voting with data required for evidence-based policymaking.”

**Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director** said, “NYPIRG applauds Senate action on this package of elections reforms. Included in these measures are new tools to combat efforts to suppress the vote. Given the ongoing attacks on voting rights, these steps can show the nation a blueprint for action.”

**Dustin Czarny, Onondaga County Board of Elections Commissioner and Chair of the NYS Elections Commissioner Association Democratic Caucus** said, “Now more than ever it is important for New York to lead on the issue of Voter protection. Passing The Rep. John Lewis Voting Rights Act (S1046E) will establish New York as a national leader in this important fight. This comprehensive first of its kind bill will provide needed oversight which is specially needed with the failure of the federal courts to protect voters. This bill along with enhancing penalties for the Act to Penalize Voter Deception and Suppression (S1032) and Preventing Electronic Interference (S118) will give New Yorkers the protections needed to ensure successful elections. Finally, the Establishing the New York Voting and Elections Database (S8202) will provide a standard for retention of election data that is vital for campaigns and activists to conduct elections and locate it in a central depository that will be a benefit for all of New York.”

**Lurie Daniel-Favors, Esq, Acting Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College (CLSJ)** said, “The New York State Voting Rights Act proposed by State Senator Zellnor Myrie and passed by the Senate will protect Black New Yorkers and other people of color from voter discrimination fueled by restrictive and onerous laws that chip away at minority suffrage. This critical legislation will restore the protections gutted by the 2013 Shelby County vs Holder Supreme Court decision and allow our communities to more freely engage in America’s great democracy by casting ballots to determine its future at every level. This is the very type of community-centered leadership that our communities deserve.”

**Lourdes M. Rosado, President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF** said, “As we’re seeing hundreds of bills introduced around the country to suppress voting and silence voters of color, passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York is critical to

strengthen protections against racial discrimination and voter intimidation at the polls. LatinoJustice PRLDEF strongly supports the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York because it will help us protect the fundamental right to vote and make voting more accessible to our Latino communities and all voters.”

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