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**Joint Statement
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**CIVIC GROUPS and CITY COUNCILMEMBERS URGE PASSAGE of
ELECTION REFORM BILLS
THAT WILL IMPROVE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION
AND ENCOURAGE VOTER PARTICIPATION IN NEW YORK CITY**

Effort Aims to Eliminate Persistent Challenges on Election Day

Civic organizations and Councilmembers on the steps of City Hall today called for passage of a package of election reform bills intended to help improve election administration and encourage voter participation in New York City. The groups announced their collective support just before a public hearing being held by the Government Operations Committee led by Councilmember Gale A. Brewer.

The legislative package includes bills that would improve election administration by establishing a municipal poll worker recruitment program so that the Board of Elections in the City of New York (the Board) could more easily utilize the city's workforce on Election Day ([Int. No. 721](#)). The Board would also be held more accountable for its performance by being mandated to report to the City Council during budget hearings its performance in relation to metrics in the Mayor's Management Report during budget hearings, thereby linking allocation of funds to the Board's administration of elections ([Int. No. 778](#)).

The reforms would seek to encourage voter turnout through increased dissemination of information to registered voters via email ([Int. No. 613](#)) and an expanded Voter Guide mailed or emailed to voters ([Int. No. 769](#)). Opportunities to register would be expanded by enabling parents of school children to register when they enroll their children ([Int. No. 728](#)). Agencies already required to register voters who seek agency services would be required to report the number of registrations they annually process ([Int. No. 760](#)).

New Yorkers voting experience has been plagued with problems over the past several years. While election procedures are mostly governed by state law, these bills, if passed, by the city council, will change for the better how elections are run and provide voters with more information about voting.

"New Yorkers deserve a democracy that is run professionally and encourages participation by the voters," said Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union. "Citizens Union has worked closely with members of the city council to draft and move forward this election reform package. We are proud to stand with the sponsors and our good government partners today in calling for these bills to be passed. By using modern technology and leveraging city resources, we can better disseminate vital information about voting and candidates, offer more opportunities to register, utilize the city's workforce at the polls and hold agencies accountable for providing a 21st Century democracy."

"I thank Citizens Union and the good government organizations who contacted me in regard to the package of elections bills we are hearing in the Governmental Operations Committee today," said Councilmember Gale A. Brewer. "I look forward to discussing this legislation with the Board of Elections and Campaign Finance Board, and continuing to work with all stakeholders to improve the electoral process in New York City."

"The electoral process in New York City is not perfect but we continue to develop the necessary improvements which help to make perfection attainable," said Councilmember Inez Dickens. "With the passage of this slate of legislation being discussed today of which I am the primary sponsor of one of the bills, we will make it mandatory to provide e-mail notifications of upcoming elections to voters. Our constituents need to be informed with the latest information, so voting disenfranchisement can be completely eradicated. These bills, along with mine, will continue to spur the improvement of the voting process in our great City of New York."

"Government should be doing everything in its ability to maximize the number of people participating in elections, rather than maintaining potential obstacles to democracy," said Councilmember Jumaane Williams. "Intro 760 would help improve efforts by each and every city agency to register voters. The greater the efficiency, the richer our electoral process and public discourse will be."

Int. No. 728, sponsored by Councilmember David Greenfield, requires public schools to provide voter registration forms to parents who are enrolling their children in school. "I am very proud of our efforts to include as many New Yorkers as possible in the voting process," said Councilmember Greenfield. "This bill to send a voter registration form along with a school registration form, will encourage voter participation and empower parents, including families that are new to the community. Voting is one of our fundamental rights, so it is important that all residents take part in the democratic process - especially parents who have much at stake regarding the quality of their child's education. My thanks to everyone who has played a role in supporting this legislation, including Citizens Union, the League of Women Voters, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and my Council colleagues."

Int. No. 769 helps generate awareness among New Yorkers of upcoming elections by requiring the Campaign Finance Board's Voter Guide to be published not only during years in which only city

contests are held, but also for state and federal contests. "An educated voter is the cornerstone of democracy," said Councilmember Mathieu Eugene. "With this new legislation, the people of New York City will be better equipped to vote for the candidate who best represents their values and interests. It is imperative that we empower people to become more involved in their federal, state, and local elections and to make these elections more accessible. No one should be excluded from participating because they feel that they are not able to make a well-informed decision. As elected officials, it is our responsibility to ensure that important information, such as a candidate's platform and views, is equitably distributed amongst voters. For this reason, I urge my colleagues to support Int. No. 769."

"I have been dismayed by the performance of the Board of Elections in recent years - from being unprepared for the transition to scanned paper ballots, to voters who strain to see candidates' names in 7-point font, to wheelchair-bound voters who have to go through layers of bureaucracy to be assigned to an ADA-accessible polling site," said Councilmember Brad Lander. "It is clear that the Board of Elections must be required to provide more reporting that allows us to monitor its performance from year to year and hold it accountable."

"After the September primaries, it's clear that the Board of Elections still has a lot of work to do to ensure smooth election operations. These bills are a step in the right direction," said Councilmember Jessica Lappin, the sponsor of Int. No. 721. The bill creates a poll worker recruitment program to allow the Board of Elections to tap into the city workforce during Election Day to employ city employees as poll workers.


"New York's dismal voter participation rates make it clear that we are nearing a crisis. The bills being considered today will mean more registered voters, more informed voters, more accountability from the Board of Elections and better poll sites," said Neal Rosenstein, an Election Specialist with the New York Public Interest Research Group. "These are common sense reforms whose time has come. We urge the Council to pass these important bills and for the Mayor to sign them into law," he added.

Common Cause/NY Executive Director Susan Lerner said, "Common Cause/NY strongly supports these election reform bills and applauds their sponsors for being willing to take action to begin to reform New York's antiquated election administration. There is much to be done to bring New York's elections fully into the 21st century and these bills are a good first step. This package of bills contains many worthwhile procedures to encourage voter registration and increased voter participation in elections. We hope to see these good ideas implemented as soon as possible."

"The League of Women Voters supports the election related bills that will come before the City Council Governmental Operations Committee today," said Kate Doran, Chairwoman of the City Affairs Committee of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York. "All of them will create more transparency, greater accountability, and bring more people into the electoral process. The League was an early and strong supporter of Intro 728 which requires voter registration forms be provided to parents enrolling children in school. Parents and children are prime stakeholders in this city and every effort should be made to provide the opportunity for them to participate in the political process."

"The legislature should make it a high priority to pass legislation that will improve New York's dismal registration and participation rates," said Larry Norden, Deputy Director of the Brennan Center's Democracy Program.

"Integrity in the voting process is a cornerstone to a healthy and functioning democracy," New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman said. "These sensible reforms will help ensure that New Yorkers can successfully exercise their right to vote and make their voices heard on Election Day."



[Citizens Union](#) is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public.

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