



**MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT –S.5288 (Squadron)/A.657 (Kavanagh)
June 2, 2009**

Title

An act to amend the election law, in relation to the composition of boards of elections.

Summary

The bill proposes to amend section 8 of article 2 of the New York State Constitution relating to qualifications for members of state boards of elections.

Statement of Support

Citizens Union supports A.657/S.5288 because it would remove the arcane bipartisan requirement for the New York State Board of Elections (Board) and its officers and employees, which the state constitution currently requires for the Board and county boards and administrators. This change would allow New York to implement a much-needed, modernized election administration system.

Citizens Union of the City of New York is an independent, nonpartisan civic organization of New Yorkers that works to ensure fair elections, publicly financed campaigns, and open, effective government that is accountable to the citizens of New York. Citizens Union provides a voice for these issues and seeks to advance meaningful election reform at the state and local level.

New York is only one of two states in the country that creates a role for political parties in its state constitution and has an even-numbered bipartisan board of elections. Citizens Union proposes an elimination of the current composition of the Board and, in fact, recently released a series of recommendations outlining its specific proposals for a new election administration structure for New York. The detailed recommendations from our forthcoming report, *New York Needs Election Reform Now: Industrial Age Patronage to Information Age Accountability*, are available on our website – www.citizensunion.org. We recommend, among other things, that the state legislature not only remove the bipartisan requirement for the Board through a constitutional amendment, but that it also amend State Election Law to create a new nine member nonpartisan State Election Board that will work in conjunction with a single Chief Election Officer who primarily would be responsible for all policy-making and the day-to-day operations of elections at the state level. At the local level, the county executive or in the case of New York City, the Mayor, would appoint a Chief Local Election Officer who would work with an appointed Board of Canvassers, who would only be responsible for voter registration and the counting of ballots.

This bill takes an important step toward ending the two-party management of elections and allows for needed accountability and stronger integrity in the administration of elections. Citizens Union recommends that the legislature strongly consider implementing our recommendation for an alternate election administration structure.

We urge the Legislature to promptly pass this legislation. Citizens Union appreciates the opportunity to share its views and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Legislature to implement meaningful election reform, both on a structural and procedural level, to ensure New Yorkers can rely on open, accessible and accountable elections.