



February 7, 2025

VIA EMAIL

Kathy Hochul  
Governor, State of New York

Carl Heastie  
Speaker, New York State Assembly

Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Majority Leader, New York State Senate

**RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SPECIAL ELECTION CALENDAR**

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie,

We write in relation to reports that the Legislature is considering amendments to the state Election Law to alter the administration of special elections in New York. We urge you not to change the law mid-cycle. As organizations that have closely studied this issue, we submit the following comments.

**1. No to the control of party insiders over party nominees**

Currently, special elections circumvent party primaries by using closed-door decisions in which the party leadership chooses its nominee, and everyday New Yorkers are cut out of the process. Once elected – even in a special election – a lawmaker is very likely to be re-elected. Previous [studies](#) found that about a third of the Legislature was elected to office this way. As part of any change to the special election calendar, we urge you to change this undemocratic process and adopt a real reform that gives the voter real choices. Specifically, we urge you to adopt a new process that includes holding a primary election in advance of the special election or holding a nonpartisan special election process in which the special election ballot is open to all candidates who meet petition requirements --- which has proven very successful in New York City.

**2. Yes to election consolidation to increase voter turnout**

Special elections typically suffer from very low voter turnout. To increase turnout, political scientists recommend consolidating standalone special elections with primary or general elections to maximize voter participation. In recent years, New York [has started to do so](#), and that should continue. However, the goal of increasing voter turnout must be balanced against the concern that vacancies do not remain unfilled for extended periods, leaving constituents without representation. We appreciate that the legislature has some existing bill on this topic, such as a [proposal](#) to consolidate special elections with primary or general elections when a vacancy occurs between 90 and 180 days before those elections.

**3. No to expediting legislation to serve political objectives**

Changing election law mid-cycle to serve immediate political objectives undermines the principles of good governance. The election process should not be subject to political manipulation. Changes to special election rules should not take effect immediately. Similarly, we oppose the use of a Message of Necessity to advance such a proposal; there is no emergency to justify bypassing public review of this significant piece of legislation.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and look forward to further discussions on how to ensure that New York's election system remains open and fair.

Sincerely,

Betsy Gotbaum,  
Executive Director  
Citizens Union

John Kaehny  
Executive Director  
Reinvent Albany