

MEMO OF SUPPORT FOR MULTIPLE ELECTION REFORM & PRO-DEMOCRACY BILLS

before the Senate Standing Committee on Elections

March 12, 2024

Common Cause New York is pleased to see such a robust agenda before the Senate Elections Committee today. Many of these bills reflect our longstanding priorities and support the dual goals of improving our elections and strengthening our democracy ahead of a critical election cycle. We look forward to the Senate passing these bills quickly:

REFORM THE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Common Cause New York has been a long time champion of systemic reform which is why we support:

- **S136 Krueger An act to amend the election law, in relation to the compensation of election inspectors and coordinators.** Increased compensation is needed as the rates have not been updated in nearly twenty years.
- **S585A May An act to amend the election law, in relation to the removal of an election commissioner.** It is exceedingly difficult to remove election commissioners from their position. Under current statute, only the Governor can remove a BOE commissioner from their post. This bill would provide a much needed relief valve to local counties who could have the power of removal as needed.
- **S609 Hoylman-Sigal An act to amend the election law, in relation to split shifts for election inspectors or poll clerks.** Allows for poll clerks to work split shifts which would ease the burden on poll clerks during long election days.
- **S611A Mayer An act to amend the election law, in relation to making commissioners full time employees of the board.** Commissioners would be able to serve in a full time capacity which would hopefully allow boards to attract a fully professionalized staff.

- **S612A Mayer An act to amend the election law, in relation to prohibiting conflicts of interest among board of elections employees.** Sets clear conflicts of interest guidelines and prohibits boards of elections (BOEs) employees from having a financial interest in relation to vendors¹ and clarifies BOE employees must take a leave of absence if they are a candidate in an election in which their local board oversees. These are obvious measures which would, again, foster increased confidence in the fair administration of elections.
- **S613A Myrie An act to amend the tax law, in relation to subtracting from the federal adjusted gross income any income earned by election inspectors, poll clerks, or election coordinators; and to amend the social services law, in relation to exempting income earned by election inspectors, poll clerks, or election coordinators from being included in the calculation of the amount of benefits under public assistance programs.** Recruiting and retaining poll workers is always a challenge. Income earned while serving as a temporary election worker should not be included in certain types of overall wage calculations that impact the determination of public benefits.
- **S614 Myrie An act to amend the election law, in relation to prohibiting election commissioners and deputy election commissioners from holding a publicly elected office.** This bill would prohibit deputy election commissioners from holding public office or serving as a political party chair. It is an obvious measure to foster public trust in the fair administration of our elections. There is a grandfather clause that exempts existing employees from this new restriction.
- **S617 Myrie An act to amend the election law, in relation to mandatory training curriculum for election commissioners and key staff of boards of elections.** Election commissioners are frequently appointed with minimal election administration experience. While commissioners are not required to have such experience, developing a thorough and mandatory election administration curriculum will only help commissioners make important, informed decisions about a range of mundane and critical policy choices in their roles.
- **S619A Krueger An act to amend the election law, in relation to the exercise of powers and duties of the board of elections of the city of New York and its executive management.** CCNY supports the broad reform provisions outlined in this

¹ Examples of vendors include but are not limited to voting machine or printing services vendors.

bill as it will create a substantive, enforceable accountability structure for the commissioners and senior administrative staff. We see this bill as a step on the way to a complete restructuring of boards of elections throughout the state.

- **S644A Mannion An act to amend the election law, in relation to establishing minimum staffing levels for local boards of elections.** Too often smaller local boards of elections are understaffed to the point that the commissioners are functionally assuming too much responsibility. In some counties, this has resulted in the BOE being unable to perform its most basic functions, as was revealed in the recent litigation regarding the 2020 election for Congressional District 22. Establishing mandatory staffing minimums would force boards to professionalize staff in a more diffuse organizational structure and ensure successful performance of their statutory duties.
- **S645A Mannion An act to amend the election law, in relation to requiring a commissioner to meet certain qualifications before his or her appointment.** Common Cause New York has long supported professionalizing boards of elections at all levels. It is especially critical that commissioners, who are responsible for a wide range of election administration decisions, have the appropriate skills, background, and knowledge to effectively manage elections.
- **S6933A Webb An act to amend the election law, in relation to the terms of office of election commissioners.** Election commissioners around the state should serve uniform terms. This bill would standardize the term to four years around the state.

STRENGTHEN OUR DEMOCRACY

Daily assaults on our democracy will only increase as we move further into the 2024 election cycle. New York must take every opportunity to increase faith in our elections, protect voters from misleading/deceptive information, and reduce cynicism in the outcome:

- **S5553A Skoufis An act to amend the election law, in relation to political contributions by corporations.** This bill would ban corporate donations and align New York with federal standards.
- **S8631 Gonzalez An act to amend the election law, in relation to proceedings to prohibit the use of materially deceptive media in political communications.** Alarm bells have been ringing regarding the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) to

generate misleading if not downright false images and audio to be used in campaign ads. We wholeheartedly support regulating deepfakes to ensure the integrity of our elections and protect voters from misleading information through the requirement of a mandatory voter disclosure if content has been manipulated and strong enforcement provisions if there are violations of the law. [Read our standalone MOS here.](#)

- **S8464 Skoufis An act to amend the election law, in relation to moving the date of the meeting of the electors and the method for the transmission of the certificates of vote.** This bill would bring New York in compliance with the provisions of the Electoral Count Reform Act.

EXPAND VOTER OUTREACH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Common Cause New York has always been a supporter of any and all opportunities to engage voters around elections and encourage them to vote. That's why we support:

- **S2331A Myrie An act to amend the election law, in relation to notifying voters of the candidates and upcoming elections.** Historically, New York has done little to consistently notify voters of upcoming elections or provide information on candidates. Counties are largely left on their own to conduct any kind of voter outreach and create voter guides. This has been a glaring deficit that would go a long way towards ensuring voters have the information they need on election day.

This bill would set minimum thresholds for the State Board of Elections in providing helpful information to voters including a voter guide with candidate information, the creation and maintenance of a website for the voter guide, election notification postcards, and mandatory TV and radio advertisements ten days before an election. New York's voter turnout remains stubbornly low, and New York needs to be far more aggressive in encouraging voters to show up at the polls.