

December 30, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
President and Majority Leader of the New York State Senate  
State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker of the New York State Assembly  
State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

We write to strongly encourage you to prioritize the passage of A. 4987 and S. 1931 to restore voting rights to all New Yorkers upon release from prison in the 2021 legislative session.

Since our coalition was formed in 2018, restoring voting rights for New Yorkers with past convictions has been one of our top priorities for strengthening our state's democracy. And many of our organizations have been fighting for rights restoration for far longer. While we commend you for the great progress that has been made on many other priorities over the past two years, the legislature's inaction on this fundamental issue has been a glaring omission. Given the shameful history that led to felony disenfranchisement in New York, and the continuing harmful impact of the law on Black and brown communities today, this omission has become even more pronounced as New York, and the nation, have finally begun to grapple more honestly with racial justice in recent months. And while this legislation has lingered in New York, other states like California, Colorado, Nevada, and New Jersey have all changed their policies to allow everyone in the community to vote.

We applauded the Governor for using his executive authority to restore voting rights to people on parole. But his action is no substitute for permanent legislation for several reasons. The current process results in a weeks-long delay between an individual's release from prison and when they get their voting rights back, leaving room for confusion among election officials about who is eligible to vote. It is also discretionary, can be easily rescinded by future governors, and is an inefficient use of government resources.

A. 4987 and S. 1931 would go a long way towards addressing each of these issues. Importantly, by amending New York's election law so that the automatic restoration of voting rights upon release from prison is the law of the land, this legislation would ensure that no one has to rely on a discretionary pardon to vote. Second, by providing notice and an opportunity to register upon an individual's release from prison, the legislation would also ensure that legal restoration of

voting rights results in registration and voting among New Yorkers returning home from prison. Equally important, the legislation would reduce confusion among election officials and prospective voters alike by enacting a simple, bright line rule: if you are living in the community, you can vote.

As our nation's democracy has come under attack, New York can strengthen its commitment to inclusive voting laws by passing A. 4987 and S. 1931. We hope you will prioritize election reform in the coming legislative session, as you have each of the last two years. But as our democracy moves forward, no one should be left behind. We urge you to put rights restoration at the top of your list.

Sincerely,

100 Black Construction Workers  
Alliance of Families for Justice  
Association of Legal Aid Attorneys  
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law  
Brooklyn Voters Alliance  
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Central in Action Leadership Team, Central Synagogue  
Chinese-American Planning Council  
Citizen Action of New York  
Citizens Union of the City of New York  
College and Community Fellowship  
Common Cause New York  
Community Service Society of New York  
Council on American-Islamic Relations, New York (CAIR-NY)  
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance  
Empire State Indivisible  
Equitable Future, Inc.  
Exodus Transitional Community  
Generation Vote  
Indivisible Brooklyn  
Inwood Indivisible  
John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity  
Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice  
League of Women Voters of New York State  
Let NY Vote  
Long Island Civic Engagement Table  
Long Island Progressive Coalition  
Mid-Hudson Valley DSA  
MinKwon Center for Community Action  
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)  
New Hour for Women & Children—LI  
New York City Jericho Movement

New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)  
New York Democratic Lawyers Council  
The New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council, AFL-CIO  
New York Society for Ethical Culture  
New York State Nurses Association  
Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson  
Parole Preparation Project  
Release Aging People in Prison  
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)  
Rochester Jericho Movement  
Stand Up America  
VOCAL-NY  
VoteEarlyNY