

March 1, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader, New York State Senate

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly

VIA Email

Re: Support for Enacting and Fully Funding the Doctor John L. Flateau Voting and Elections Database and Academic Center (A885A/S657A)

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

The undersigned organizations commend the New York State Senate for passing Senate Bill S657A, the “Doctor John L. Flateau Voting and Elections Database and Academic Center of New York Act,” on January 8, 2024. We urge the Assembly to pass its companion bill A885A without delay and ask Governor Hochul to sign it into law. In addition, we urge you to ensure that the final state budget for FY 2025 allocates \$4.5 million to fully fund this important legislation.

This bipartisan legislation is a key priority for our nonpartisan organizations and the voters we serve. It will create the Doctor John L. Flateau Voting and Elections Database and Academic Center (“VEDAC”), honoring Dr. Flateau’s legacy of service as an elections official, civil rights advocate, and educator whose commitment to a more robust, inclusive democracy should continue to inspire future generations. VEDAC will be a central, public repository for election and demographic data, which will be administered and maintained by the State Board of Elections (“SBOE”), in partnership with our public university systems. It will be accessible to all New Yorkers.

VEDAC will foster unprecedented transparency in New York’s elections and facilitate evidence-based election administration across the state. It will also serve as a critical complement to one of the most important pro-voter laws enacted anywhere in the country in recent years: the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (“NYVRA”), which you delivered to New York’s voters in 2022.¹ We are grateful for your steadfast leadership on voting rights, exemplified by the NYVRA. Our state is becoming a beacon of pro-voter reforms, both for New Yorkers and for other states—including Connecticut, which enacted similar legislation last year.²

¹ N.Y.S. Leg., S1046E/A6678E (enacted June 20, 2022).

² NAACP Legal Defense Fund, *The Connecticut Voting Rights Act, Explained* (2023), <https://www.naacpldf.org/connecticut-voting-rights-act/>.

VEDAC will strengthen and build on this landmark success by enabling policymakers, election administrators, voters, community groups, scholars, civil rights advocates, and others to access the data and analyses they need to identify practices that undermine our democracy. It will help these stakeholders develop ways to improve equitable access to the right to vote. In concert with the NYVRA's measures, VEDAC will empower New York voters to identify and resolve barriers to the franchise—and make it possible for election administrators and local officials to understand and address such issues proactively.

For these reasons, we urge you to ensure that the final FY 2025 budget allocates \$4.5 million—\$2.5 million to the SBOE and \$2 million to be allocated between the State University of New York and the City University of New York—to fully fund A885A/S657A. In addition, we call on the Assembly and Governor Hochul to ensure that A885A/S657A is passed and signed into law as soon as possible.

We are grateful for your leadership in building a stronger and more inclusive democracy in our state. We look forward to working with you to ensure that these critical priorities are funded and implemented.

Sincerely,

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
Brooklyn Voters Alliance
Campaign Legal Center
Center for Law and Social Justice, Medgar Evers College, CUNY
Citizen Action of New York
Common Cause/New York
Dominicanos USA
Downstate New York ADAPT
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance
FairVote Action
Generation Vote
Greater New York Council of the Blind
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of Women Voters of New York State
MinKwon Center for Community Action
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
NALEO Educational Fund
National Association of Social Workers, New York State Chapter
National Federation of the Blind of New York State
The New York Civil Liberties Union
New York League of Conservation Voters
One Heart, One Vision
Vote Early New York
The Workers Circle