

February 23, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader, New York State Senate  
172 State Street, The Capitol, Room 330  
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker, New York State Assembly  
Legislative Office Building 932  
Albany, NY 12248

**Re: Support for S657/A885 (2023-2024)**

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

The undersigned civil and voting rights legal organizations commend the New York State Senate for passing Senate Bill S657 (Myrie) on January 9, 2023. We urge the New York State Assembly to follow suit by passing A885 (Walker), its Assembly companion bill, and we encourage Governor Hochul to sign this bill as soon as it reaches her desk.

This bipartisan legislation will create the New York Voting and Elections Database and Institute administered and maintained by our public university systems and accessible to all New Yorkers. NYVEDI will foster unprecedented based election administration across the state. NYVEDI will serve as a critical complement to the <sup>1</sup> 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 and to develop ways to improve equitable access to the right to vote.

As civil and voting rights legal organizations committed to protecting and promoting the right to vote, S657/A885 is a key priority for our organizations. Presently, it is often difficult to access even the most basic information required to analyze whether and to what extent New Yorkers are equally able to cast a meaningful ballot. This vital information includes election results, voter files, shapefiles of local redistricting maps, locations of polling places, and other key data from election authorities, as well as precinct-level Census and American Community Survey data. This data

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<sup>1</sup> N.Y.S. Leg., S1046E/A6678E (enacted June 20, 2022). See Legal Defense Fund, *The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York*, <https://www.naacpldf.org/new-york-voting-rights-act/>.

belongs to the public yet, at present, acquiring it requires approaching each jurisdiction of interest with FOIL requests in an inefficient and impractical fashion that hinders our efforts to protect New York voters.

The lack of access to these critical types of data impedes transparency, accountability, and meaningful voting rights enforcement. NYVEDI will remedy this problem by providing easy access to data that can shed light on whether jurisdictions are providing equitable access to the

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 call on the New York State Assembly and Governor Hochul to ensure that S657/A885 is enacted and signed into law as soon as possible. In addition, we encourage each chamber of the New York State Legislature to allocate \$5 million to fully fund both S657/A885 (\$2.4 million) and NYVRA preclearance by the Office of the Attorney General (\$2.6 million) for State Fiscal Year 2023-24.

We applaud the Governor's commitment to voting rights enforcement in the Executive Budget. Now, we encourage the Governor and the Legislature to enact and sign into law S657/A885 and to provide the funding required to build and maintain rights across our state more efficient and effective.

We look forward to working with Governor Hochul, as well as lawmakers in the Senate and Assembly, to ensure that these critical priorities are implemented.

Sincerely,

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)  
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law  
Campaign Legal Center  
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.  
New York Civil Liberties Union