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New York Senate Passes Landmark Voting Rights Legislation

Civil Rights Organizations Urge Assembly to Act, Finalize Best-in-Nation Voting Rights Reforms

As the New York legislature kicks off its final week, civil and voting rights groups applaud lawmakers in the NY Senate for voting to approve the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (NYVRA), and call for final passage from the Assembly before the session ends June 2nd.

With federal voting rights legislation stalled in the U.S. Senate, and many states moving to restrict voting since the 2020 election, these groups say it is imperative for states like New York to step up to root out discrimination and restore vital protections that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ensured before the Supreme Court's *Shelby v Holder* decision in 2013. More than 70 organizations recently [sent a letter](#) to Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie urging the swift passage of the NYVRA before the end of the legislative session.

The NYVRA's critical protections include:

- Launching a “preclearance” program that requires local governments with records of discrimination to prove that proposed voting changes will not harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Providing new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting provisions in court.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction.
- Instructing state judges to interpret election laws in a pro-voter way whenever possible, so that close questions of legal interpretation are resolved in favor of the rights of qualified voters.
- Establishing, through companion legislation, a central hub for election data and demographic information that will empower officials and community members to ensure accessible elections.

Members of the coalition offered the quotes below in support of passage:

“The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York represents hope for New Yorkers of color who are entitled to an equal opportunity to hold local government officials accountable at the

ballot box,” said **L. Joy Williams, President of Brooklyn NAACP and Legislative Director for the NAACP New York State Conference of Branches.** “I commend the steadfast leadership of Senator Zellnor Myrie and Assemblymember Latrice Walker along with Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie in making sure New York State leads the country by passing the strongest and most comprehensive state voting rights act to date, with the nation’s first state pre clearance program. This historic vote comes at a time when leadership from elected officials on voting rights is desperately needed and provides a roadmap for our colleagues in other states fighting for voting rights that change is possible.”

“Strong Senate leadership has pushed our state a big step closer to becoming the truly inclusive, multiracial democracy all New Yorkers deserve,” said **Perry Grossman, supervising attorney at the NYCLU.** “Now it’s time for the Assembly to finish the job, and push the NYVRA across the finish line before the session ends this Thursday.”

“We commend Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senator Zellnor Myrie for their leadership in shepherding the bill through the Senate,” said **Janai Nelson, President and Director-Counsel of the Legal Defense Fund.** “As the late John Lewis himself once said, the right to vote is ‘almost sacred.’ That profound truth, as well as the current national context in which the right to vote is under siege, is why it is imperative that the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York become law.”

“In the wake of the white supremacist shooting in Buffalo, we applaud the New York legislature for continuing to work to give Black communities what we truly need—not thoughts and prayers, but the power to ensure government is responsive to our needs,” said **Karen Wharton, Democracy Coalition Coordinator, Citizen Action of New York.** “Power at the local level determines how our youth are educated, and the NYVRA will help Black and Brown communities get fair representation on school boards, city councils, and more.”

“Voting rights need protection from the Far Right in states across the country, even in New York,” said **People For the American Way Executive Director and former Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick.** “On behalf of our tens of thousands of activists in the state, along with dozens of members of our Young Elected Officials network and African American Ministers In Action, we applaud the NY Senate for passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York, and we urge the State Assembly and Governor Hochul to join them in protecting access to the ballot box.”

“As a long time New Yorker, I know that the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of New York is exactly what the state needs,” said **Maya Wiley, president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.** “As Congress has failed to move on critical voting rights legislation, it is inspiring to see efforts at the state level to secure our freedom to vote. We urge the state legislature to pass this important legislation and for the governor to sign it into law. We will also continue to fight for a federal voting rights bill -- a state by state patchwork of voting laws isn't the model we should strive for.”

“This is New York’s moment to lead,” said **Sean Morales-Doyle, acting director in the Voting Rights Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law**. “With federal voter protections weaker than they have been in generations and major elections around the corner, New York has the opportunity to set a much-needed example for the nation with the NYVRA. The Assembly must act now to get this bill to the governor’s desk before June 2.”

“The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York would ensure every New Yorker can cast their ballot freely and fairly,” said **Ann Toback, CEO, The Workers Circle**. “It would rectify long lines at the polls, protect voters against intimidation and expand language access. These protections would remedy voter suppression tactics that have disproportionately impact voters of color, right here in New York State. As a Jewish social justice organization whose members have fought fascism and defended democracy for more than a century, passage of this bill is a fundamental issue of racial justice and equality. We urge the Assembly to move this bill forward quickly and that Governor Hochul sign without delay.”

“Throughout New York and across the country, young voters have faced hurdles to exercise their power at the ballot box,” said **Brianna Cea, Executive Director of Generation Vote**. “With the most racially and ethnically diverse generation entering the electorate, New York has the opportunity to lead and pass the strongest voting rights act that will save our democracy for generations to come. We urge the Assembly to do everything in their power to pass the NYVRA and fight for a just democracy for all New Yorkers.”

“It’s only democracy when all the people can vote,” said **Michael Quackenbush, co-founder, Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance**.

“We’re witnessing an unprecedented assault on voter rights in this country,” said **David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York**. “At least 27 states have introduced more than 250 bills that would [restrict voting](#). Extreme gerrymandering threatens to further dilute Black and Brown voices. In the face of the anti-democratic forces in Congress that blocked the Freedom to Vote Act and John R. Lewis Voting Rights, New York must lead by enacting the strongest voting rights act in the country. That means passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (NYVRA) before the end of the legislative session. In doing so, we will show the rest of the nation how democracy is supposed to work.”

“Equal access to voting is a central tenet of democracy. Systemic racism has kept communities of color from exercising this basic right for far too long,” said **Dr. Samantha Fletcher, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, New York State chapter**. “New York must lead the effort to ensure every citizen has equal access to the voting booth. Social workers in New York commend the Senate and urge the Assembly to pass the NYVRA before the end of the session.”

“The time has come for Albany lawmakers to take a giant leap forward in safeguarding our civil rights by enacting a state-level Voting Rights Act”, said **Jarret Berg, Co-Founder and Voting Rights Counsel at Vote Early New York**. “Doing so will protect New Yorkers and serve as a

model to liberal democracies in need of modern tools to face down the challenges of rising authoritarianism and disdain for fair elections.”

“The New York State Voting Rights Act will empower voters and strengthen our democracy, two goals of the League of Women Voters of New York State,” said **Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, LWWNYS**. “The NYVRA guarantees that the rights of all voters are protected and the ability to cast their ballot is not hindered. This act will add much needed transparency and accountability to our election processes and streamline the process for addressing instances of voter disenfranchisement, all important requirements of encouraging all voters to participate in the election system.”

“By ensuring critical protections and rooting out discrimination, New York will establish itself as a venerable national leader on voting rights and fair elections in the wake of our federal government's failure to restore vital voter protections.” said **Alejandra Pollak, Executive Director, New York Democratic Lawyers Council**. “We thank Senator Myrie and Assemblymember Walker for their steadfast championing of voting rights in New York and are pleased to see leaders in Albany prioritizing the passage of The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York in this session. We urge Speaker Heastie and Governor Hochul to lead us over the finish line. The time is now.”

“As other states pass bill after bill to suppress the vote, New York’s Senate has taken a stand against the discriminatory practices that continue to undermine the voting rights of New Yorkers, especially voters of color—from long lines to inconvenient polling locations and failures to provide language assistance,” said **Reggie Thedford, Deputy Political Director for Stand Up America**. “Our state representatives must pass the New York Voting Rights Act before the end of the legislative session to protect the voices of *all* New York voters and make our state a model for voting protections across the country.”

“Voting is the hallmark of our democracy, and yet here in New York, discriminatory barriers remain that disproportionately impact voters of color and prevent equitable participation in our elections,” said **Scott Richman, ADL New York / New Jersey Regional Director**. “Our state has both a unique opportunity and a moral imperative to become a national leader on this issue, and we commend leadership for giving the NYVRA priority attention and ensuring its passage before the end of the session.”

“Senator Myrie and Assembly Member Walker have been steadfast leaders for New York voters who deserve a democracy where everyone can be heard,” said **Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq. Executive Director at the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College**. “They’ve crafted the strongest state voting rights act in the nation and brought it to the finish line. It’s New York’s time to lead.”

“As New York’s fastest growing racial group, Asian Americans are participating in our democratic process in record numbers, as voters and as elected officers,” said **Jerry Vattamala, Director of AALDEF’s Democracy Program**. “The marginalization of Asian Americans and other communities of color has historically undermined our ability to participate in the decision making of the city and state we contribute so much to. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York will ensure that all New Yorkers will have the voice they deserve and the power to elect leaders that truly represent them.”

“As we’re seeing hundreds of bills introduced around the country to suppress voting and silence voters of color, passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York is critical to strengthen protections against racial discrimination and voter intimidation at the polls,” said **Lourdes M. Rosado, President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. “LatinoJustice PRLDEF strongly supports the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York because it will help us protect the fundamental right to vote and make voting more accessible to our Latino communities and all voters.”

"Leadership is critical at this moment, if we are to build a multiracial democracy where our communities can thrive and raise our voices, no exceptions. It's time to pass the New York Voting Rights Act, a strong set of voter protections with robust community support," said **Tam Doan, deputy director of the Voting Rights and Democracy Program at the Center for Popular Democracy**. "By ensuring the freedom to vote and choose our leaders, New York can shine a light on the way forward."

“As voting rights are under attack across the country, New York has an opportunity to lead. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York will be a huge step forward in New York’s move from worst to first,” said **Julie Kerr, Executive Committee member of Brooklyn Voters Alliance**. “The protections afforded in the NYVRA will increase accountability and transparency, boosting voters’ confidence in our elections at this crucial time. We celebrate its passage in the State Senate and thank Senator Zellnor Myrie for his leadership in voting rights, and this legislation in particular. We call on Governor Hochul and Speaker Heastie to bring the NYVRA over the finish line.”

“The New York Vote Rights Act (NYVRA) is expansive, including restoration of one of the key provisions of the Voting Rights Act: pre-clearance,” said **Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY**. “The bill will protect historically disenfranchised communities from voter intimidation tactics while expanding language access for non-English speakers. Common Cause/NY applauds the NYS Senate for passing the bill and encourages the Assembly to do the same before session ends. It’s time New York is a national leader on voting rights.”

“The New York County Lawyers’ Association Voting Rights Task Force applauds the New York State Senate for passing the most important legislation ensuring voter protection and voter access in decades,” said **Onya Brinson of the NYCLA Voting Rights Task Force**. In a time when voting rights are under assault across the country, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York ensures that jurisdictions across New York that wish to change election laws or procedures prove that there will be no discriminatory impact or purpose and creates protections against voter suppression tactics such as voter purges that have too often disenfranchised voters of color. New York has the opportunity to be a model in restoring access to the ballot for all New Yorkers. The NYCLA Voting Rights Task Force commends the Senate for recognizing this and now we urge the Assembly to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act expeditiously and for Governor Hochul to sign this legislation without delay.”