

June 7, 2016

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Senate District 2
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Speaker Carl E. Heastie
Assembly District 83
Legislative Office Building 932
Albany, NY 12224

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

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Flanagan, Speaker Heastie, and
Assemblyman Cusick:

On behalf of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law,¹ we write to encourage the state legislature to enact automatic and online voter registration bills during this legislative session. Assembly Bills 10371 and 10370, which provide for automatic and online voter registration, respectively, are important building blocks that will make voter registration easier for all New Yorkers and make New York a leader in voter participation and election administration. These bills provide an opportunity for New York to join the ranks of states like California, West Virginia, Illinois, and Vermont, which have recently adopted reforms facilitating voter participation.²

First, we want to commend Assemblyman Cusick for introducing Assembly Bill 10370, and Assemblyman David Gantt for introducing Assembly Bill 10371. A.B. 10370 establishes an electronic personal voter registration process that provides for online voter registration. This bill allows voters to provide a signature at the polls on Election Day, and expands on the online system currently offered by the New York Department of Motor Vehicles. Making online registration opportunities accessible to individuals who lack an ID issued by the DMV is particularly important to communities of color, as detailed in the Lawyers' Committee's report, "Online Voter Registration:

¹ The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to secure equal justice through the rule of law, with a particular focus on the inequities confronting African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.

² See, e.g., Michael Wines, *Jury Out on Effectiveness as Some States Make Voting Easier*, N.Y. TIMES, June 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/05/us/jury-out-on-effectiveness-as-some-states-make-voting-easier.html?_r=0.



Accessible for all?”³ A.B. 10371 establishes an integrated automatic voter registration process for individuals who submit an application for services at various state agencies. We specifically applaud the bill’s provision for the reinstatement of eligible voters to the rolls who were previously incarcerated but have had their rights restored.

These reforms are crucial for New York’s voters. Many New Yorkers who unsuccessfully attempted to participate in past elections would have been able to vote if these measures had been in place. In both the 2014 general and 2016 presidential preference primary elections, the Lawyers’ Committee’s Election Protection Hotline, 866-OUR-VOTE, received hundreds of calls from New Yorkers with questions or problems surrounding their registration status. Some individuals were not registered at all, while others had moved and not updated their address with their Board of Elections. Many of these voters could have benefited from the ease and efficiency provided by online or automatic voter registration.

To provide the opportunity for more New Yorkers to engage in the democratic process and have their voices heard, we strongly encourage you to enact Assembly Bills 10370 and 10371. As Governor Cuomo noted in his State of the State address, “the key to reforming our government is engaging people in the democratic process.” New York’s terrible voter turnout rates (53.1% in 2012 and 28.2% in 2014), which are among the worst in the nation for voter participation, underscore the need for these improvements to the voting process.

Thank you for your consideration. If the Lawyers’ Committee can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact President & Executive Director Kristen Clarke at kclarke@lawyerscommittee.org or 202-662-8300.

³ The report is available online at <https://lawyerscommittee.org/publication/online-voter-registration-accessible-for-all/>.

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Sincerely,

Kristen Clarke

President & Executive Director
Lawyers' Committee for Civil
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John Nonna

Co-Chair, Board of Directors
Lawyers' Committee for Civil
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cc: Melissa DeRosa, Chief of Staff
Alphonso David, Counsel

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