

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

Youth Pre-Registration to Vote A1070 (Kavanagh) / S1661 (Carlucci)

The New York Democratic Lawyers Council (NYDLC) strongly supports the enactment of A1070/S1667. This bill, which has passed the Assembly in prior years, amends the Election Law to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote and requires local Boards of Education to develop policies to promote voter registration among students. Pre-registrants get placed on the voter rolls at age 18, only after verification of eligibility and residency.

Among voting-age Americans, registration rates remain stubbornly low for young people and there is intensified public interest in revitalizing a culture of civic engagement and participation. Registration rates are even lower among minority youths and those from marginalized communities.¹ A prerequisite to increasing participation is eliminating procedural barriers, the most significant of which is our voter registration requirement.

Encouraging future voters to pre-register before they turn 18 where existing convenient opportunities arise (e.g. when they first get a learners permit, driver license, or are still in a high school educational setting) eliminates a barrier to participation by avoiding the need for young people (age 18-24), who may be busy with entry-level jobs, higher education, or new family obligations to actively seek out the Board of Elections in order to register.

Voter pre-registration has the potential to boost turnout. As FairVote and other advocates explain, “[a]cademic studies and electoral analyses show that voting behavior is habit-forming. If you vote, you will likely keep voting. If you don’t vote, you probably won’t start.”² Given New York’s chronically low turnout, it is vitally important to engage young people early in their development to create a habit of voting and a renewed culture of civic engagement.

At least 17 states plus Washington DC permit pre-registration of either 16 or 17 year-olds (May 2017). This reform increases youth registration and turnout, particularly among minorities, when combined with outreach programs.

With minimal burden on Boards of Elections or schools, this bill is likely to raise youth registration rates, improve youth turnout, and encourage civic engagement. **NYDLC believes that youth civic engagement is crucial to the health of our democracy and urges the legislature to enact A1070 / S1661.**

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html>.

² FairVote, Voter Pre-Registration FAQ, www.fairvote.org/voter_pre_registration#facts_about_voter_pre_registration (accessed May 18, 2017).