

## MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

### Youth Preregistration to Vote

A774 (Lavine) / S1100 (Carlucci)

The New York Democratic Lawyers Council (NYDLC) strongly supports the enactment of A774/S1100. This bill amends the Election Law to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote and requires local Boards of Education to develop policies to promote student voter registration. Pre-registrants have a “pending” status and are only placed on the voter rolls at age 18 after verification of eligibility and residency. This legislation first passed the Assembly in 2013 and 2014.

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.<sup>1</sup> A prerequisite to increasing political participation is improving access and reducing procedural barriers, the most significant of which is New York’s voter registration requirement.

Encouraging future voters to preregister 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) reduces a barrier to participation by avoiding the need for young people (age 18-24), who may be busy with inflexible entry-level jobs, education, and family obligations to proactively seek out the Board of Elections merely to register, so they may later exercise their rights.

Youth preregistration 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.

As of 2018, 17 states plus Washington DC permit preregistration of either 16 or 17 year-olds.<sup>3</sup> 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, especially when combined with other outreach programs.

**For the foregoing reasons, NYDLC supports the enactment of a youth preregistration program.**

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> FairVote, Voter Pre-Registration FAQ, [www.fairvote.org/voter\\_pre\\_registration#facts\\_about\\_voter\\_pre\\_registration](http://www.fairvote.org/voter_pre_registration#facts_about_voter_pre_registration) (accessed Jan 12, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Nat’l Conference of State Legislators, *Preregistration for Young Voters*, <https://bit.ly/1gkhoJG>.