



New York City Campaign Finance Board
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**Testimony of Amy Loprest
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**City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
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Good morning, Chair Kallos and members of the Government Operations Committee. I am Amy Loprest, Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board. I would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to testify on the bills under consideration today.

As you know, the CFB works to register voters and promote civic engagement through our NYC Votes campaign. Our Voter Assistance Unit served as a lead coordinator on National Voter Registration Day. While we are still processing our final tally from NVRD, we registered over 3,000 new voters to date. Under both Local Law 29 and Directive 1, we work with city agencies to provide voter registration opportunities in their public spaces.

We believe it is critical that every eligible citizen be able to register to vote and cast a ballot with ease. Unfortunately, our election system falls short. We calculate that there are nearly 1 million citizens of voting age in this city not registered to vote. Only 1 in 5 citizens of voting age actually cast a ballot in the 2014 elections. And we know that turnout was particularly low for younger voters between the ages of 18 to 29. We support efforts to

create more registration opportunities, and we applaud the City Council for doing what you can to remedy this crisis.

However, it is clear our elections need a fundamental upgrade at the state level. We need more action in Albany on this issue. That is why NYC Votes is working to coordinate a statewide effort for Voter Day 2016, to bring concerned citizens to Albany on May 3rd to call for changes to our outdated election laws.

To turn to the bills under consideration today, the CFB currently provides training to Local Law 29 agencies on how to provide voter registration forms in their offices and assist voters in filling these out. Int. No. 796 would increase those current requirements, so that agencies would also assist voters with completing the optional section to register to donate their organs and tissues. If the bill passes, the CFB will modify its training to reflect these additional requirements. We urge the City Council to work with the administration before implementing any changes for agencies conducting voter registration.

The CFB supports Int. No. 464, which would require the Department of Corrections to administer a program distributing absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots to jailed individuals. We believe that spending time in a corrections facility should not be an additional barrier to exercising one's right to vote. The Department of Corrections is a covered registration agency under Local Law 29, and has a longstanding commitment to increasing the number of registrations at the sites they oversee. Because of this commitment, they have served as a model for other agencies and shared best practices at

the trainings that we administer to agency staff. We urge the City Council to work with the DOC to ensure that any program design included in this bill fits in with their operational needs while also effectively promoting absentee voting.

We have also found that confusion about voting rights does not end when people leave a correction facility. This topic was discussed at the most recent meeting of our Voter Assistance Advisory Committee; many New Yorkers on parole or probation do not understand if or when they can register or vote. We urge you to extend your efforts to ensuring that the Department of Probation continues to educate their clients on this issue as they re-enter society.

Int. No. 628 would require the Department of Education to distribute registration forms to city students that are coded by district, which would better provide the ability to track and optimize efforts to get younger New Yorkers engaged in the political process early. Amending Local Law 34 to add new coded forms for the Department of Education would allow us to track registration activity, as we currently do with Code 9 forms for city agencies and Code D forms for CUNY schools. These new opportunities for data collection and reporting will highlight areas of success—as well as pointing to places where more could be done. This level of accountability will ensure that we commit to creating a civic culture that welcomes young voters into the fold.

While these bills would help create registration and voting opportunities at the city level, we need action from the state in order to fundamentally overhaul our outdated pen-and-

paper voter registration system. The CFB supports Res. No. 695 and Res. No. 848 to call upon Albany to pass pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, expand online registration, and amend the state constitution to allow for same day registration.

But we ask the City Council to go even further, and call on the Assembly and Senate to pass the Voter Empowerment Act (A5972/S2538A). The Voter Empowerment Act encompasses the measures in Res. No. 695 and Res. No. 848, and additionally includes automatic voter registration at the DMV and other government agencies—unless voters choose to opt out. This is the most comprehensive voting reform legislation pending in Albany. As I mentioned earlier, NYC Votes was able to register 3,000 new voters in one day on NVRD, through hard work and coordination with some excellent partners. With the Voter Empowerment Act, on the other hand, we could get all one million unregistered New Yorkers onto the voter rolls practically overnight.

It is long past time we discarded the pen-and-paper registration system we currently use and bring voter registration into the 21st century. This is why NYC Votes has made the Voter Empowerment Act part of its agenda. For the past two years, we have brought concerned citizens to Albany to tell their legislators why voting reforms matter to them. However, we have seen little momentum on this issue. We are working to make voting reform a top priority in 2016. In addition to bringing citizen volunteers to Albany on May 3rd, we are collecting petition signatures to support the Voter Empowerment Act, early voting, and better ballot design. We want to ensure that every eligible New Yorker is registered, every voter can get to the polls, and each voter can cast a ballot that counts. We

ask that everyone here today sign our petitions to send a clear message to our state legislators, and we ask that City Council members get their constituents involved by asking them to sign these petitions or get on the bus to Albany with us in May.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.