



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Stephanie A. Miner, Mayor

August 13, 2015

Hon. Carl Heastie  
Speaker, NYS Assembly  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. John Flanagan  
Majority Leader, NYS Senate  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Jeffrey Klein  
Majority Coalition Co-Leader  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. William B. Magnarelli  
NYS Assembly  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. John A. DeFrancisco  
NYS Senate  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. David J. Valesky  
NYS Senate  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Legislators:

With the current influx of money into our political system, it has become increasingly important to engage citizens in the political process. In the 2014 elections, only 28.8% of New York State's eligible voting population participated, despite three statewide elections and 27 congressional elections. This rate of voter turnout is the fourth lowest in the nation. Voter participation is key to ensuring citizens are engaged with their governments which is critical to a thriving democracy. I urge you to support legislation that would improve access to voting for all New Yorkers.

As the burden to vote becomes greater for many in the United States—even in New York—access to the ballot and the ease of voting has lagged behind the technological advances we rely upon in almost every other aspect of our life. It has also had a disproportionate impact on those in our society who need strong representation the most. Syracuse has one of the highest poverty rates in the United States, with 35.7% of the population living in poverty. The Syracuse City School District has the fourth highest poverty rate in New York State with more than three quarters of students qualifying for free lunch. Voter participation rates mirror income levels. It is time we pull back the curtain to the voting booth and give each New Yorker easy, fair, and consistent access to their right to vote.

The first step to improving ballot access is to pass A4433/ S3813, a bill would establish early voting twenty days before an election. There are now 33 states in our country that have adopted some form of early voting with the time frame stretching from three to 45 days. When voters have an increased time frame to access the ballot box, they are more inclined to vote and encourage others around them to do the same.

The next step is to enable “no excuse” permanent absentee voting. Currently, there are 27 states that permit this type of absentee voting, allowing eligible voters to request a ballot they can submit by mail without mandating the voter declare a reason for voting absentee. Out of those 27 states, 6 states allow voters to join a permanent absentee list, meaning they will receive an absentee ballot automatically for all future elections. At this time, two bills which would set up a “no excuse” permanent absentee system, A3874 and S4456. It is important to ensure same-as legislation is agreed upon by the conferences and includes a permanent option.

The third step we can take is to support universal voter registration. This allows for every citizen to be automatically registered to vote at age 18 unless they choose to opt out. The law would remove another hurdle that disproportionately affects young voters and the underprivileged. This proposal was recently implemented in Oregon, which then added hundreds of thousands of new voters to its rolls. This would help reinvigorate citizens’ confidence in government and remind each of us that the more people who participate in government, the stronger our state and country become.

These proposals will increase accountability, transparency, and make government more accessible to all New Yorkers. They have been tested across the United States and been proven to increase voter turnout and representation. New York State’s archaic voting rules disproportionately affect the poorest members of our community, individuals of color, and young people—those people who most desperately need the attention of their government. We can no longer exacerbate this problem by perpetuating the status quo. It is time to act and I strongly encourage you to move these proposals forward.

Sincerely,



Stephanie A Miner  
Mayor of Syracuse