



**CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on**  
**Governmental Operations Re: Agency Registration Bills**  
**November 24, 2014**

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Good morning, Chair Kallos and members of the Governmental Operations committee. My name is Peggy Farber, and I am legislative counsel of Citizens Union, a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. We serve as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform.

Citizens Union has long been active on the issue of voter registration and in May 2014 we and our colleagues in the Pro-Voter Coalition began a review of the city's compliance with agency-based registration required under Local Law 29 of 2000, and recommended changes to make the city's program a national model. Using FOIL requests and site visits, the Coalition determined that New Yorkers were not being given the opportunity the vote by the vast majority of agencies. Mayor de Blasio issued Directive 1 in July 2014, which began the city on the path toward compliance, and the Pro-Voter Coalition has had encouraging meetings with the administration in recent months.

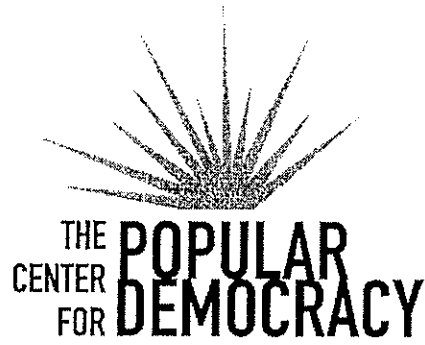
The council's action to pass 2 important pieces of legislation – Intro 493-A and Intro 365-A – will ensure that New Yorkers have greater opportunities to register to vote, and will also codify some of the work begun by the administration.

Citizens Union supports these bills as meaningful steps to improve the Pro-Voter Law, and to codify the important work of the de Blasio administration.

We thank Councilmembers Kallos and Williams for their leadership on the bills, with which we are closely familiar. Citizens Union worked with Councilmember Williams on Intro 365-A, and we are glad to see the bill come to fruition.

Citizens Union urges the Council to continue to examine the Pro-Voter program as the administration implements Directive 1, specifically in the following areas:

- opportunities to utilize electronic voter registration to modernize the process
- requiring similar reporting of voter registration efforts by the City Clerk and community boards
- tracking additional data, such as instances of individuals declining to register to vote when receiving services, as is collected under the National Voter Registration Act.



New York City Council Committee on Government Operations

November 24, 2014

Testimony of Steven Carbó

Director of Voting Rights and Democracy Initiatives

The Center for Popular Democracy

Good morning Chairman Kallos and members of the Committee on Government Operations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify again on section 1057-a of the New York City Charter, the Pro-Voter Law. My name is Steven Carbó. I serve as the Director of Voting Rights and Democracy Initiatives at the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD). CPD is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

As CPD and its partners in the Pro-Voter Coalition testified before this Committee on October 23, 2014, the evidence shows that 14 years after its enactment, the Pro-Voter Law has been roundly ignored by the municipal agencies subject to its provisions. The agencies have simply failed to offer voter registration to their clients, as the law requires. See <http://populardemocracy.org/news/broken-promise-agency-based-voter-registration-new-york-city>. Likely hundreds of thousands, if not millions of eligible voters were never given the opportunity to register to vote over the years, perpetuating regrettably low rates of voter registration in New York, particularly among lower-income, of color, and immigrant citizens.

We are therefore very pleased by the initiatives undertaken by this Committee to correct course and prod municipal agencies to comply with the Pro-Voter Law. CPD strongly supports all three measures being considered today. If adopted and fully implemented, each will represent a large step forward towards greatly expanded voter registration opportunities for the residents of New York City.

### Resolution

The current, blanket code assigned by the New York City Board of Elections to every city agency distributing voter registration forms frustrates oversight over agency compliance with the Law. It is essential that we distinguish the forms given to one agency from those given to another in order to assess the performance of individual agencies and take corrective action, where needed. The Resolution before this Committee, which calls on the state legislature to pass and the governor to sign legislation permitting the use of coded voter registration forms specific to each agency, will greatly assist proper oversight over the Pro-Voter Law and facilitate agency accountability.

### Int. 493-A

The legislation introduced by the Chair, as amended, represents a great improvement of the Pro-Voter Law. We expect that the mandatory agency assistance that it requires be provided to clients in the completion of voter registration forms, commensurate with the assistance provided in the completion of the agency's own forms, will help increase voter registration rates, as the Pro-Voter Law contemplated. The integration of voter registration applications into agency forms – an effective means of ensuring that voter registration is not overlooked by agency staff - was anticipated by the Law many years ago. We applaud the Chair's requirement that such integration be completed by December 1, 2015, if not sooner. The bill's directive that voter registration forms be in the same language as agency forms will benefit the large and

increasingly diverse pool of limited-English-proficient citizens served by municipal agencies. The increase in agencies subject to the Pro-Voter Law is also welcome

Int. 356-A

The legislation introduced by Council Member Williams will also facilitate rigorous oversight over the law. As with the Resolution being considered today, it calls for the regular reporting of metrics vital for assessing compliance with the Pro-Voter Law by each agency. If enacted, it too will bring us closer towards enhanced voter registration in New York City.

Agency-based voter registration is a powerful tool for increasing voter registration and helping facilitate greater citizen engagement in elections. Properly implemented and appropriately updated, the Pro-Voter Law can meet that demand and serve as a model to other cities across the nation. We applaud the Committee on its attention towards this long-overlooked statute. CPD looks forward to continued dialogue with the Committee and Council on additional program enhancements.

Testimony of Lauren George, Common Cause New York  
November 24, 2014 to the Committee on Governmental Operations

Dear Chairman Kallos and Members of the Governmental Operations Committee,

Common Cause New York is grateful to the City Council for taking up this important issue and working to improve the compliance and utilization of city agency-based voter registration. We commend the Council for its pro-active approach to strengthening voter registration efforts with Int. 356 and Int. 493. While expanding the list of agencies required to offer voter registration (especially the HRA as Int. 493 does) is a positive step, we feel that tracking and strengthening compliance with existing requirements (as Int. 356 does) is the most important factor to improving voter registration. Coding voter registration forms is the crucial first step to better tracking and improving compliance with the City Charter Section 1057-A. Therefore Common Cause strongly supports Resolution T2014-2130 calling for State Legislative action.

Common Cause fights to strengthen public participation and faith in our institutions of self-government and to ensure that government and political processes serve the public interest, and not simply the special interests. For more than 30 years, we have worked at both the state and municipal level to bring about honest, open and accountable government. We have been a long-standing advocate for innovative campaign finance and ethics laws in New York, as well as throughout the country. Common Cause is actively engaged in Election Protection as well as election administration reform efforts across the country.

Thank you for the opportunity for input.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 32nd, 493A Res. No. X  
 in favor  in opposition  
Date: 11/24/14

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Steven Carbo  
Address: 802 Kent Ave, Bklyn  
I represent: Center for Popular Democracy  
Address: 802 Kent Ave

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition  
Date: 11/24/14

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Peggy Farber  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
I represent: Citizens Union of the City of NY  
Address: 299 Broadway, NY, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms