

Whereas, The right to free and fair elections is the bedrock of any democratic society; and

Whereas, In order to attain free and fair elections, it is crucial that voters are not disenfranchised during the election process; and

Whereas, One of the major causes of voter disenfranchisement is poor ballot design whereby ballots are either miscast or lost; and

Whereas, According to the Brennan Center for Justice, potentially hundreds of thousands of votes are lost or miscast in every election due to poor ballot design; and

Whereas, Ballot design reemerged as an issue in the 2010 Primary Elections in New York City, when many voters complained about the small font size and poor design used on the newly-introduced paper ballots; and

Whereas, An informal City Council survey concerning the subsequent 2010 General Election revealed that over one-third of respondents found the ballots difficult to read or confusing, with font size and layout being among the most common complaints; and

Whereas, New York City's current ballot format is dictated by New York State Election Law and is the relic of a time when ballots were designed for use with the older generation of mechanical voting machines; and

Whereas, Both the United States Election Assistance Commission and the Brennan Center have published reports recommending that the ballot layout should be redesigned and that it should include large, legible fonts; that ballot instructions should be brief, simple, and clear; that ballot design should be consistent; and that ballots should be easy to understand visually; and

Whereas, New York State Senator Joseph Addabbo and New York State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh have introduced bills (S609-A and A4696-A respectively) that would mandate improved ballot design by amending the Election Law to require that paper ballots be easily readable; and

Whereas, These bills would also require that the candidate's name be printed with the first initial of each name capitalized followed by lower case letters, presented in a bold typeface with a minimum font size of 12, and that all other text relating to position, party affiliation and ballot questions also be easily readable; and

Whereas, The bills would also require the boards of elections for New York State, New York City, and Erie, Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties to employ one full-time employee trained in ballot design who would also be available to advise other county boards of election on their ballot design; and

Whereas, New York State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh has introduced bill number A7492-A, also known as the “Voter Friendly Ballot Act of 2011,” which would provide a remedy for New York’s hard to read ballot by setting forth specifications that would create a ballot layout that is straightforward; and

Whereas, the specifications set forth in the bill would remove unnecessary clutter from the ballot, simplify the ballot instructions, and provide for consistent ballot design; and

Whereas, the bill would also require the New York State Board of Elections to publish and distribute a master template ballot for statewide elections; and

Whereas, all three bills further the important goal of improving ballot design in New York State and would significantly reduce voter disenfranchisement; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the New York State Governor to sign into law legislation that would require that paper ballots be designed in a more user-friendly manner.

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