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ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINORITY CONFERENCE

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June 27th, 2023

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Governor Hochul:

We, the undersigned, are the members of the Albany County Legislature's Minority Conference, and we write urging you to veto S.3505-B (Skoufis) / A.4282-B (Paulin). This legislation, recently passed by both houses of the legislature, would move the elections of most local elected officials into the same electoral cycle as Governor or President. We think this change would have a decidedly negative effect on the conduct of local elections, as well as on the public discourse surrounding local issues.

As you know from your time as a member of the Hamburg Town Board and as Erie County Clerk, local issues are extremely important and worth close examination by the voting public. These kinds of issues – whether they be something as straight-forward as constructing a new local park or something as complex as tax distribution models – affect every New Yorker in some way. Unfortunately, over-the-top rhetoric and partisanship consume the national political discourse. Should the referenced legislation become law, it will be almost impossible for local elected officials of either or no party to make their case to voters without important local issues being overshadowed by the latest national controversy du jour. This is not only lamentable, given how critical many local issues are, but it also cheapens the democratic experience in our State and runs contrary to the basic expectation of home rule and self-governance provided for under the State Constitution and decades of statute.

Effectiveness of increasing voter turnout should also be considered. A phenomenon known to experts as “downballot roll off” occurs when individuals vote for top of the ticket offices (such as President or Governor) but do not vote for other offices lower on the ballot. This is already occurring in situations where congressional and state legislative seats are paired with contested executive races; 2022 research from the Sister District Project indicated this occurs with Democratic voters 93.08% of the time and Republican voters 75.47% of the time. When considering this level of drop-off in the context of the extremely long ballots in most New York State towns and counties that would be created by this law, it becomes clear that the central argument behind this legislation – the purported increase of turnout in local elections – is dubious at best.

The proposed consolidation of elections will also pose several logistical issues. We have been informed by the Albany County Board of Elections that our voting machines and printers in Albany County are not compatible with

elections which may include up to 30 elected offices should this proposal take effect. They place the cost of new hardware in the millions of dollars, a cost which negates any purported savings the sponsors of this bill claim will create. In addition, adding local elections to busy presidential years will lead to longer lines according to the Board of Elections, as sorting voters into many different small geographic district will take time. You have no doubt seen the hour long lines in some presidential and gubernatorial elections; adding both the sorting of voters as well as any assistance necessary to find a downballot office holder in a field of 30 or more offices will magnify long lines and congestion at polling places.

Local oversight of issues affecting municipal residents is not only a cherished cornerstone of American democracy, it is also guaranteed by the State Constitution. In our view, the proposed legislation S.3505-B / A.4282-B seriously undermines these values and will make local government less effective. The legislation will also fall short of its intended goals of increasing voter participation, as levels of voter drop-off downballot and election site complications will likely mean local elections remain relatively low-turnout in practice. For all of the foregoing reasons, we urge you to veto this harmful piece of legislation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Frank A. Mauriello
Albany County Legislator, District 27
Minority Leader



Paul Burgdorf
Albany County Legislator, District 23
Deputy Minority Leader



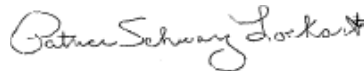
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Albany County Legislator, District 19



Jennifer Whalen
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