

Originally published in

# New York Law Journal

## The Bar Should Support Voting Reforms

*Unfortunately, New York has trailed behind in voting access.*

October 26, 2018



By [Jerry H. Goldfeder](#)

**B**rad Karp and Robert Atkins’ article about the importance of voting is a welcome reminder to the legal community of our role in preserving the rule of law (“Democracy Itself is On the Ballot,” N.Y.L.J., Oct. 26, p.6). Unfortunately, New York has trailed behind in voting access.

Thirty-seven states have early voting; New York does not. Twelve states and Washington D.C. have automatic registration; we have an unnecessarily long waiting period before new registrations or change in party enrollment take effect. Twenty-six states and D.C. permit no-excuse absentee voting; New Yorkers must attest to illness or absence from their county to exercise this basic voting procedure. And fifteen cities and the state of Maine have Instant run-off elections; for city-wide primaries in New York City, we have costly, low-turnout run-off elections.

As the outgoing chair of the New York City Affairs Committee of the New York City Bar Association, I recently testified at the City Council’s Charter Revision Commission, proposing that it adopt our “Democracy Agenda”—mandating early voting, enhanced registration and enrollment opportunities, no-excuse absentee voting and instant run-off for our municipal elections. Without having to wait any longer for Albany to enact these reforms, the city should exercise its state constitutional and statutory authority to do so on its own. That is how we achieved the finest campaign finance law in the nation, term limits, non-partisan vacancy elections and more liberalized ballot access requirements.

As the Charter Commission meets throughout the next year to consider various ways to improve city government, the bar has the opportunity to play an active role in supporting voting and other reforms.

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