

**Testimony**  
**of**  
**Borough President FERNANDO FERRER**  
**supporting strengthening the "Pro-Voter Act," Int. No. 450-B**  
**City Council Committee on Government Operations**  
**Wednesday, April 19**

Good Morning. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on legislation that encourages New York City residents to participate in civic life by increasing their access to voter registration.

Public officials make a positive contribution to our community when they work to ease, expand and encourage public participation in the electoral process. This legislation is an example of such a contribution because it seeks to increase access to voter registration through free and wide distribution of voter registration forms through city agencies. Where people go to seek public services, they should have an opportunity to register.

I recommend that New York City public schools be added as designated agencies for voter registration. Let's build on the example of CUNY where each institution follows a legal mandate to make voter registration forms available to its students. This year alone, thousands of NYC high school students will reach the voting age while they are still enrolled in school. By proactively making voter registration forms available to young people we empower them, and we encourage them to become active and concerned citizens. Voter registration builds on existing citizenship curricula in our schools.

The availability of voter registration forms at public schools will also benefit the parents and/or guardians of NYC public school students. Parents and/or guardians will have access to voter registration forms when they visit schools to enroll their children, for PTA meetings, or for any other service. In addition, afterschool programs, Beacon Schools and other educational resource centers offer opportunities to engage eligible voters to register. It's important to note, while registration can be conducted in public schools, we can also encourage parochial, yeshivot and other non-public schools to engage in the process.

Furthermore, let's look at using our faith-based institutions and civic organizations that are not connected to designated agencies. This process need not and should not interfere with the separation of church and state. Churches are an integral part of our community. But many new New Yorkers can also be reached through this means and let's not shun an opportunity to encourage involvement.

I also support the recommendation by NYPIRG, Common Cause and others, of a citywide mailing of voter registration forms and election information during presidential elections years. Such a mailing would be effective because it is the most direct way to reach a potential registrant -- in the home.

My recommendations are in step with the spirit of the Pro-Voter Act -- to facilitate public access to voter registration. I urge the Committee to pass this very important piece of legislation with the aforementioned recommendations.