United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) supports S1381A (Comrie)/A1722A (Zinerman), which would require ballot questions to be written and presented to voters in a unified, simple format with easily understood language. This legislation mandates that proposed amendments and other questions submitted to a statewide vote will be set forth on the ballot in plain language that identifies the practical impact of adopting or rejecting the amendment or other measure and requires no more than an eighth grade reading level.

This bill would help voters understand what they are voting on. Currently, New York State Election Law requires that ballot measures be “clear and coherent.” But too many voters, regardless of educational attainment, know that what appears on the ballot is often confusing and difficult to understand. Voters who don’t understand what they are asked to vote on, often do not vote on the measure at all or vote against it. Making sure that voters can understand the description on the ballot will also make it easier to raise public awareness about the measures which the Legislature places before the electorate.

Additionally, the plain language requirements would establish clear standards for readability and uniformity. Recent ballot proposals have required that voters read at a college level in order to understand the proposal. In contrast, this bill would ensure that language on the ballot would be no more complicated than an eighth grade reading comprehension level and that the question would always be in a simple Yes or No format. This requirement will also facilitate easier and more accurate translation of ballot questions into languages other than English.

**Elections in New York State must be inclusive of all literacy levels to ensure that no one is excluded from fully participating in the democratic process. UNH urges the prompt passage of this legislation by the State Legislature to ensure that our elections are accessible to all eligible voters in New York.**

UNH has led efforts to expand and protect the franchise for decades, most recently supporting State reforms such as early voting and automatic voter registration, and in New York City leading the campaign to allow legal permanent residents to vote in municipal elections. UNH also leads extensive nonpartisan Get Out The Vote efforts with settlement houses each year, working to register and turnout more individuals. All of these efforts are rooted in a philosophy that civic engagement strengthens communities. With strong voter participation we can elect the people who develop policies that more accurately represent the interests of their communities.

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United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 46 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.