



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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MEMO OF SUPPORT

S.5314 (Mayer)/A.7837 (Benedetto)

Relates to time allowed for employees of schools to vote; provides that such employees shall only be eligible for time off to vote if the employee does not have 4 consecutive non-working hours either before the polls open or before the polls close

The Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) strongly supports S.5314/A.7837 which would amend the recently enacted state budget language that changed the requirements surrounding paid time off to vote.

The recently enacted 2019/20 state budget expanded requirement for paid time off to vote during any election from two hours to three hours. Additionally, the budget removed the qualifier that this only applied to employees who did not have “adequate” (four consecutive hours) to vote before or after work.

LHEC strongly supports participation in all elections, but the removal of the four-hour qualifier will lead to many unintended consequences on school districts and the students they serve. For example, the newly enacted paid time off requirement is for any election, and special elections can occur throughout the year and are hard to plan for in advance. When an employee avails themselves to this option this requires the school districts to bring in substitute teachers, which can be costly and at times difficult to do. This is particularly problematic as the June primary in 2020 is scheduled during a Regents exam week when school districts need their regular classroom staff on hand.

This law will make it harder for school districts to achieve their 180-session day and instructional hour requirements. If staff was to take off en masse on election days the school would potentially have to look at closing school those days. Doing so would cause calendaring issues and potentially lead to a reduction in state aid.

This legislation would restore the four-hour qualifier for public school districts, non-public schools, charter schools and BOCES employees. A majority of these employees already have adequate time off to vote as defined under the previous law. If they do not, they would of course be provided the three hours off to vote.

This legislation is very important to help school districts avoid costly measures and not interrupt regular classroom instruction for students. For these reasons and more, LHEC supports S.5314/A.7837 and urges its enactment.