

Memorandum of SUPPORT

A.4743 (Galef)

Provides that school districts may have the authority to decline or change a school building's designation as a polling place.

The New York State School Boards Association *supports* the above referenced legislation and urges its immediate enactment.

This bill would allow school districts the right to refuse their schools' designation as polling places for general, primary, special and district elections by moving board elections and budget votes to other public buildings. Currently, if a school building is selected as a polling location by the county board of elections, the district has no recourse. In addition, most school districts are required to hold board elections and budget votes in school buildings.

At a time when school districts are continually the targets of violent incidents, many districts across the state have invested in varied security enhancements including the hardening of doors and windows. They have also adopted policies that limit access to school buildings. Such policies may include keeping doors locked, required identification and escorts to enter the building. On election days, those procedures must be suspended and this can allow unfettered access to buildings and students.

Recent changes in state law have made the issue of requiring voting in schools more immediate. For instance, the adoption of early voting means that the number of days in which a school building may be designated as a polling place is exponentially increased. Moreover, the merging of the state and federal primary days into a single merged primary in June falls in the midst of the Regents exams.

Some groups have suggested that the way to address these safety concerns is to have schools close so their buildings can be used for voting. However, between the general elections, primary day, special elections, school board elections and budget votes, bond votes and now early voting, the potential exists for a building to suspend security protocols and open the building more than a dozen days per year. It would make it nearly impossible for districts to close all of those days and still be open the required 180 days to receive a full state aid award; and closing on a required Regents exam day is not an option.

Keeping our students and staff safe is a top priority for district leaders. Allowing districts to determine if they can safely accommodate voting in their buildings is an important component of safety planning.

For these reasons, NYSSBA *supports* the above referenced legislation and urges its immediate enactment. For additional information, please contact NYSSBA Governmental Relations at 518-783-0200.