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JOINT STATEMENT ON REQUIRING SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE PAID TIME OFF FOR VOTING

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Before state lawmakers leave Albany, it is imperative that they restore an important protection for school districts that was omitted from a new law providing paid time off for employees to vote.

The law, which was passed as a part of the state budget this spring, extends the paid time off that employers must provide for voting to three hours, an increase from the previous two-hour maximum. The new paid-time-off provision did not, however, carry over a critical safeguard from the previous law recognizing the special circumstances of schools and their employees, most of whom have plenty of time to vote after work.

With New York's primary day fast approaching on June 25 – the final day of testing for this year's Regents exams – the need to address this oversight is urgent.

We are asking lawmakers to restore the "adequate time" qualifier for school district employees who already have at least four consecutive hours available to vote when they're not at work. This includes most teachers, as well as bus drivers, classroom aides and other workers who are critical to school operations.

When these employees are absent, it triggers a cascade of disruptive consequences for students, school operations and taxpayers.

Teacher substitutes must be secured at a typical cost of \$100 or more a day, if they can be found at all. The cost easily could soar into thousands of dollars for one day.

If enough subs cannot be found, buses are idled and classes must be canceled. Local school superintendents may have no alternative but to close school.

That would compromise our ability to deliver the minimum 180 days of instructional time required to receive full state aid allocations because the law applies to primary, local, and special elections, not just the general election in November.

For the sake of public school children, we urge lawmakers to enact legislation, S.5314/A.7837, sponsored by Sen. Shelley Mayer and Assemblymember Michael Benedetto to restore the caveat that only those school district employees who lack four consecutive non-working hours available to vote (while the polls are open) are entitled to this leave.