

## Polling Place Safety

### A.4743 (Galef)

**THE COUNCIL SUPPORTS authorizing school districts to decline designation of school buildings as polling places.**

School superintendents in New York State and across America take it as a personal obligation to all families to do everything possible to keep every child safe while they are at school, away from home. In aftermath of last year's terrible tragedies in parkland, Florida and elsewhere,, superintendents and their local partners have been re-examining security in their schools and attempting to reassure families that no deficiency is being overlooked and no reasonable improvement will be dismissed. Our schools remain among the safest places for children and young people.

However, current laws surrounding the designation of polling places makes the job of keeping students safe on election days more challenging. Once a county board of elections designated a school building as a polling place, that school building must be made available for the election. All other public buildings have the ability to attempt to reject their designation, but school buildings do not have that same authority.

This legislation would enable schools to better protect students by providing schools with two new options. In one scenario, a school building could reject its designation as a polling location and the board of elections would be forced to designate another polling location. Alternatively, the school district could designate another district owned building within the appropriate boundaries for the election in which polling would take place.

The concerns of superintendents over mandating school buildings to host general, primary and special elections is solely based in concerns over student safety. We understand and respect that some policymakers have concerns that allowing school buildings to reject their polling place designation would harm voter turnout. We respect these concerns, but with the state rapidly enacting new laws and policies to increase turnout, any negative consequence on voter turnout from this legislation would be quickly outweighed by other electoral reforms.

Parents across the state have been demanding since the horrific attacks in Newtown and Parkland that schools take significant and sometimes costly actions to ensure all students are kept out of harm's way. Schools have heeded these requests, but their ability to meet the full demands of parents and the community is hindered by the current polling place law.

We urge the legislature to act this session to allow schools to maintain full control over who is allowed to enter school buildings when students are present.

***THE COUNCIL strongly supports this legislation and urges its approval.***

