

GENERATION VOTE

# IMPACT REPORT 2020



# **ABOUT GENERATION VOTE**

**Generation Vote (GenVote) is building a youth-led movement that defends and advances voting rights for our generation.**

**GenVote has been at the forefront of expanding voting rights for young people across New York. Since 2018, our team has been the leading youth organizers for Let NY Vote, the largest voting rights coalition responsible for pushing forward the first voter reform efforts in over one hundred years in New York.**

**Generation Vote was founded in 2017 and is an all-volunteer, youth-driven organization. In the past year, we've expanded our GenVote Network across New York, Florida and California.**

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO & FOUNDER

In 2020, our generation has spoken. We made Donald Trump a ONE-TERM president and Joe Biden will be the 46th President of the United States, alongside the historic election of our first Black, South Asian-American woman, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. In critical states, young, Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous organizers mobilized their communities to break voter turnout records and our generation owes our new future to their efforts.

As always, I am so inspired by YOU - the amazing young leaders and allies in our GenVote community. GenVoters led the way for youth voting rights in their communities, whether it be securing the first early voting site at the famous Skirball Center or fighting for time off to vote in upstate New York.

For the first time ever, we organized a national youth-led election protection program and trained organizers in New York, Florida, Texas, California, New Jersey, and Virginia on how to safely monitor the polls and assist voters in person and online.

Our work is far from over. In the coming months, we will continue to pioneer youth voting rights reforms in our home state of New York and across the country. Even in the face of rampant voter suppression, we will reimagine a new youth voting rights agenda and build a multi-racial, youth-led movement for the next generation of democracy warriors. Let's get to work.

**BRIANNA CEA**  
*CEO and Founder*

# OUR TEAM IN 2020



**Brianna Cea**  
CEO + Founder



**Brendan Cushing**  
Director of Programming



**Scott Benson**  
Director of Digital Strategy



**Disha Singh**  
Director of Digital Media



**Ramya Gopalakrishnan**  
Organizing Director



**Ramon Contreras**  
Board Member



**Wisdom Cole**  
Board Member



**Sean Morales-Doyle**  
Board Member



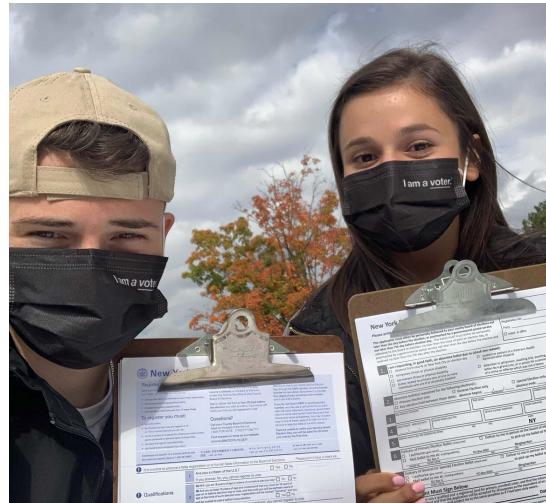
**Jeff Furman**  
Board Member

# NAVIGATING A NEW REALITY...



This year, the Covid-19 pandemic and mass disruption of educational institutions forced young organizers to grapple with unprecedented challenges to educating and mobilizing young voters. In the face of these challenges, our team was able to mobilize, educate, and connect with young people across the country in ways that we have never done before.

From hosting a series of documentary screenings for audiences in California, Georgia or Vermont, to rallying voters in Polk County, Florida and speaking with leaders in North Carolina about civic education, we were able to shape the conversation around youth voting rights in the most consequential election of our generation's lifetime.



The following are highlights of how GenVote - an all youth-led, volunteer organization - stepped up to mobilize young voters and fight for youth voting rights in New York and beyond...

# GENVOTE'S FIRST PRIMARY ELECTION

When the pandemic erupted in the spring semester, causing mass displacement and triggering rapid changes in New York's election laws, GenVoters and their faculty advisors expressed concern over organizing young voters in the 2020 presidential primary.

At the request of allies across New York state, our team consolidated election resources and drafted template language for colleges and high schools to use for educating students about the primary election. Let New York Vote advocates sent this letter to CUNY (signed by the United Student Senate), SUNY Cortland, NYU, LWV in Albany County, and all of the high schools and colleges in Dutchess County.

**GenVote@Queens College** was the first GenVote team to endorse a congressional candidate, Shaniyat Chowdury, in a primary election. To inform CUNY students about the importance of voting in local primary elections, our students partnered with the University Student Senate to host 3 virtual forums with 25 candidates running for Congress, Assembly and Senate.

Although Shaniyat did not win, our students contributed to historic turnout in one of the highest performing districts in NYC.



The poster for the Higher Education Congressional Candidate Forum is red and white. At the top, it says "HIGHER EDUCATION CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE FORUM". Below that, it lists the moderators: Brianna Coe, CEO and Co-Founder of Generation Vote and Timothy G. Hunter, Chairperson of University Student Senate, Student Government President of City Tech. It then describes the discussion: "A discussion with Congressional candidates running to represent New York on issues of higher education, voter suppression, police brutality and more." Below this, there are ten small portraits of the candidates, each with their name and position below it. At the bottom, it says "Request your absentee ballot by June 16th at [nycabsentee.com](http://nycabsentee.com)". On the right side, it says "SUNDAY, JUNE 14TH AT 5 PM" and "Streamed live on USS Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/UniversityStudentSenate/> LIVE". It also says "Submit questions at <https://tinyurl.com/ybo2628b>".

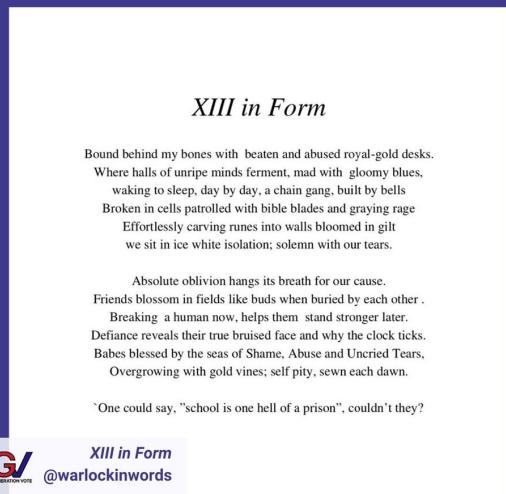
Following the primary election, GenVote was invited to again testify at the New York Campaign Finance Board Second Annual "We the Young People" hearing.

Prior to the hearing, we partnered with Y-Vote, a NYC-based civic engagement organization, to train 20 high school students on how to prepare testimony about challenges young voters faced in the primary election. Ramya Gopalakrishnan testified on the behalf of Generation Vote.

# ART & ACTIVISM

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic exposed the fatal weaknesses in our democratic, economic, and social institutions. It was quickly followed by another moment of reckoning when our nation grappled with the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the movement for Black Lives swept the nation.

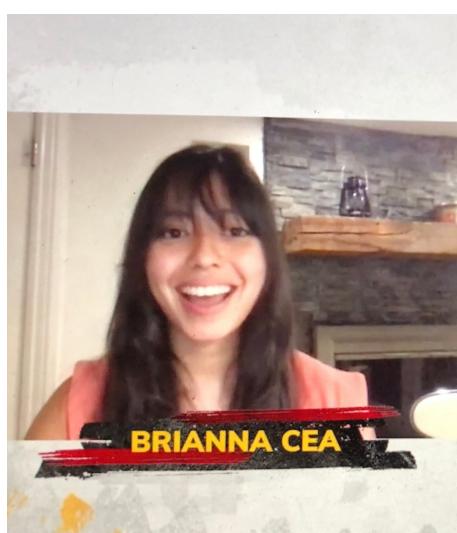
We believe in the power of art to heal our communities and support the critical role artists fulfill in movement-building. So in response to the economic crisis generated by the pandemic and in support of Black Lives Matter, Generation Vote partnered with **Tiny Snek Comics** this summer to raise over \$1,000 dollars of cash prizes for three talented young Black artists in our ***Virtual Art Contest for Black Lives*** (*winning submissions below*).



# ART & ACTIVISM WITH INTO ACTION

This summer, Generation Vote was also proud to partner with Sankofa for “Into Action.” This powerful activation spanned four days and was a celebration of community power and cultural resistance. Throughout August of 2020, we brought together hundreds of the nation’s top visual artists, activists and influencers for creative installations, powerful panels, and music performances.

In celebration of the centennial anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the beautiful struggle of political, organizing and emotional work that women leaders carry, Generation Vote co-hosted Into Action’s *Ratified: Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment* with March for Our Lives. *Ratified* premiered on Revolt TV and captured over 38,000 views.



# LEVELING UP OUR COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY



Generation Vote stepped up its commitment to democracy this year and celebrated our first civic holiday season. We coordinated network-wide campaigns during September and October as community partners for *National Voter Registration Day*, *National Vote Early Day*, and *National Voter Education Week*.

GenVoters registered students to vote via in-person and virtual registration drives, connected students with resources through peer-to-peer texting campaigns, hosted a screening of the documentary, *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, collected voter suppression testimonials from young voters, and organized a panel with voting rights experts at NYU's *GenZ: The Fight for the Youth Vote*.

We were also at the forefront of mobilizing young New Yorkers to power the polls as election workers. Generation Vote was an official partner with *Power to the Polls* and worked closely with allies across New York to educate and mobilize first-time poll workers in the lead up to the general election.

Finally, in celebration of New York's first early voting in a major presidential election, Generation Vote partnered with Plus1Vote for *March to the Polls*, which brought together activists from the Youth Climate Strikes, Sunrise Movement, and Black Women's March to march to the polls and vote early in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

# OUR 1ST ELECTION PROTECTION PROGRAM

## *New York's First Youth Election Protection Program*

In coordination with Common Cause NY and the Election Protection Coalition, Generation Vote launched New York's first youth-led election protection initiative. This initiative educated college and high school students on their rights as voters and provided students with volunteer opportunities for getting involved in election protection efforts in the lead-up to the general election.

Through our election protection initiative, GenVoters played a direct role in protecting the right to vote by poll-hopping between various polling locations and monitoring social media for misinformation, voter intimidation and providing support to voters.

Our program included a new GenVote Youth Election Protection Training Module for student volunteers, student-oriented election protection resources, staff support and an extensive field operation throughout New York state.

Participants had the opportunity to assume a leadership role and become a regional election protection captain.

Our team also worked with NYU faculty members and GenVote@NYU to launch a NYU Election Protection Corp Program. Utilizing the GenVote Youth Election Protection Training Module, our team trained and organized students in Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Virginia and California. Once trained, youth volunteers outside of New York were connected to their state's Election Protection Coalition leads and assigned election protection shifts in their communities.



# GENVOTERS STEPPED UP TO PROTECT OUR RIGHT TO VOTE



6 STATES  
(NY, FL, TX, CA, NJ, VA)



60 YOUTH VOLUNTEERS  
(COLLEGE & HIGH SCHOOL)



1/3 HIGH SCHOOL  
VOLUNTEERS



16.5 HOURS OF TRAININGS  
(IN ONE WEEK)

# FIGHTING FOR YOUTH VOTING RIGHTS IN NY & BEYOND

This year, Generation Vote continued to lead the fight for youth voting rights in New York as the co-chairs of the Let NY Vote (LNYV) Youth Working Group. We kicked off the year with our first report, *GenVote Second Annual Conference and First NY Youth Voting Rights Summit Report*. This report summarized the outcomes of Generation Vote's first NY Youth Voting Rights and Engagement Summit (November 2019) and laid the groundwork for our LNYV youth voting rights campaign.

With the help of Citizens Union and coalition partners, the report was sent to several offices of Assembly members and State Senators.

In response to the pandemic, our coalition members worked tirelessly to get out the youth vote, power the polls and fight for our right to vote throughout New York state. The following are highlights of the LNYV Working Group's achievements this election season:

- **Our Lives, Our Vote: A Rally on Primaries, Protests and Police Brutality.** This virtual rally was held on June 11, 2020 and was co-sponsored by LNYV members Generation Vote, Citizens Union, Plus1Vote, NAACP and NYCLU. It was broadcasted by *NowThisPolitics* and captured over 42,000 views!
- **NYC #OVRNOW Digital Advocacy Campaign.** In the summer of 2020, we led a coalition-wide digital campaign to pass S6463, authorizing online voter registration for NYC residents. Because of our efforts, the bill passed in the State Senate.
- **Power to the Polls.** To kick off the first National Poll Worker Day on September 1, 2020, we partnered with LNYV and local electeds to host a press conference at the NYC Board of Elections (BOE) headquarters about the importance of recruiting young poll workers.
  - We also drafted a letter with recommendations for the NYC BOE to improve their student poll worker program. This prompted the NYC BOE to clarify their policies for the 17-year-old poll workers program and publish their first website for high school student poll workers.

*In June 2020, the State Senate passed 3 bills endorsed by the LNYV Youth Working Group: 1) Online voter registration for NYC residents, 2) mandate on-campus poll sites, and 3) lower the voting age to 17 for primary elections. The State Senate and Assembly also passed Automatic Voter Registration, another major LNYV Youth working priority.*

# GENVOTE NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS

This year, our GenVote Network expanded and integrated our youth voting rights movement into their local advocacy campaigns. Since the first NY Youth Voting Rights and Engagement Summit, our students are championing many of the reforms in the *NY Youth Voting Rights Platform* in their communities. Here are some highlights from our Network:

**GenVoters at New York University (NYU)** successfully advocated for Election Day to be considered an "university holiday" AND secured NYU's first early voting polling location at the historic Skirball Center (one of only 16 early voting sites in Manhattan for the 2020 general election).

GenVote@NYU collected over 1,000 student signatures for a petition, calling on the administration to cancel classes on Election Day. With the support of a coalition of student organizations, school councils, and faculty members, GenVoters drafted a resolution that would declare Election Day as a university holiday, create a new university-wide civic engagement committee and publicly release the biennial NSLVE report. This resolution was passed by the SGA and was ultimately approved by the Administration. It will fully come into affect by 2024.



**GenVoters at SUNY Binghamton** are also calling on their administration to declare Election Day as a university holiday. As of December 2020, over 1,300 students signed GenVote@Binghamton's petition to cancel classes on Election Day. If successful, Binghamton University will be the first public university in New York to implement this initiative. GenVoters at Binghamton are currently finalizing negotiations with university administrators.

Whether it be changing public opinion about youth voting rights, to securing polling places on their campuses or cancelling classes on Election Day, GenVoters are advancing a new vision for what is possible for youth voting rights organizers across New York, and beyond.

# RIGGED DOCUMENTARY AND SCREENINGS

We partnered with the crew behind *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook* to create a short documentary about efforts to suppress the youth vote, ***View from the Student Section: The Fight for the Youth Vote.***

Filmed in the months leading up to the 2016 and 2020 elections, this short film explores the role of the student vote and the various efforts to suppress it.

Our team also participated in a series of virtual documentary screenings of *Rigged* with voters across the country and appeared on numerous panels to discuss efforts to suppress the student vote. These documentary screenings included audiences from the *Roosevelt Institute*, *Quibi*, *Next Stage Vermont* and *Spelman College*. We even held a *Rigged* screening for GenVote students, followed by a panel featuring GenVoters and youth voting rights experts (including our own Board member, Wisdom Cole!).



A promotional image for a film screening. On the left, a portrait of a man with a beard and mustache is superimposed over a map of the United States where states are colored red or blue. To the right, the word "RIGGED" is written in large red letters, with "THE VOTER SUPPRESSION PLAYBOOK" in smaller blue letters below it. The "G" logo for Generation Vote is in the top right corner. At the bottom left, text reads "GENVOTE FILM SCREENING: OCT 13 @ 7:00 PM (EST)" and "Followed by a panel discussion about youth voting rights with the NAACP Y&C, GenVote, Y-Vote and the team behind Rigged". At the bottom right, it says "NARRATED BY JEFFREY WRIGHT". A small blue banner at the very bottom provides the RSVP link: "RSVP: HTTPS://WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/E/VIRTUAL-SCREENING-OF-RIGGED-WITH-GENERATION-VOTE-TICKETS-124282880441".

# GENVOTE IN THE MEDIA

## *Shifting the Narrative of Youth Voting Rights*

Generation Vote was called on to discuss youth voter suppression and uplifted the importance of fighting for youth voting rights beyond Election Day. For the first time GenVoters received coverage in national and local outlets such as *USA Today*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS*, *New York 1*, *City Limits* and *the Statesman*. We were even featured in our first international segment with *TV Globo* - a main Brazilian network!

The screenshot shows a news article from ABC News' GMA. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for VIDEO, WELLNESS, STYLE, FAMILY, FOOD, CULTURE, LIVING, TRAVEL, NEWS, SHOP, and a search icon. Below the navigation is a video thumbnail showing a group of people in a meeting room. To the right of the video, the text reads "ABC NEWS → 2020 ELECTIONS — October 20, 2020" and "23-year-old CEO on mission to mobilize young voters". A sub-headline states "Brianna Cea started Generation Vote to stop the youth voter's oppression and advance youth voting rights in NY state and beyond." Below the video, there are social media sharing options (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Email) and a category link labeled "ELECTIONS".

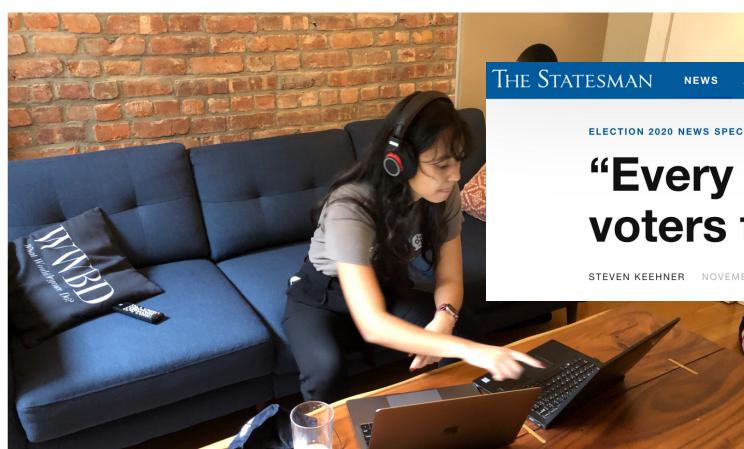
## Despite obstacles, young voters are 'raising hell' with historic early voting turnout

**Rick Jervis** USA TODAY

| Updated 10:36 p.m. ET Nov. 1, 2020

The 23-year-old is the founder of Generation Vote, recruiting young volunteers and partnering with the League of Women Voters and Common Cause. Poll watchers in 2020 do not just go to the polls. Some monitor social media, looking for people trying to suppress voter participation.

"We are training young folks to not only look to Twitter and Facebook for misinformation and disinformation, but also on the everyday platforms we use like Tiktok, Reddit, Instagram," she said.



# A NEW CHAPTER FOR GENVOTE



When we started GenVote in the Fall of 2017, we were just college students in upstate New York who wanted to spread the word about a new training model for local campaigns. But in the process of engaging young voters in electoral politics, we came across so many barriers that made it harder for students to register and vote.

From trying to arrange rides to inaccessible off-campus poll sites, to not being able to vote on Election Day because of exams and no early voting period, many GenVote students expressed confusion and frustration when trying to exercise their right to vote. So, we decided to roll up our sleeves and overhaul New York's electoral system - which had the worst electoral laws in the country.

As the lead youth organizers in Let NY Vote, we rallied, we testified, we disrupted, we educated, we lobbied and....WE WON. In 2019, NY took the first steps to update its archaic laws by passing early voting, pre-registration of 16 and 17 year olds and same-day registration.

But we did not, and will not, stop there. Even in the face of unprecedented obstacles, young voters turned out to vote in record-numbers in 2020 - **52% - 55% of registered voters under 30 cast ballots.** This election proved that our generation is the largest and most diverse bloc of voters that our country has ever seen. In response, state legislatures have already set the stage to suppress the vote of young people, Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous voters....

# OUR GENERATION IS FACING A DEMOCRATIC CRISIS

## The youth voter suppression crisis is real...

Following the 2018 midterm elections, state legislatures and local elections officials across the country moved to restrict access to the ballot for young people and people of color. And the 2020 election was no exception. Here's a few examples:

- **Making it hard for students to register to vote:** In 2018, New Hampshire passed a law requiring voters to establish domicile in the state by obtaining a New Hampshire drivers license and vehicle registration, which can costs hundreds of dollars and present a barrier to voter registration for out-of-state students and first-year college students.
- **Inaccessible Voter ID laws:** In 2011, Wisconsin passed a law requiring students to present ID containing their photo, signature, and proof of in-state residence when voting, forcing students to obtain a voter compliant ID and voter enrollment verification letter.
- **Age restrictions on mail-in voting:** In Texas, an age restriction was set on mail-in voting (only voters above the age of 65 can vote by mail), effectively barring displaced students and young voters from voting by mail in the midst of the 2020 pandemic.
- **Fees and fines:** In 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature passed a bill that prevented anyone with outstanding court fees from voting, preventing up to 80% of incarcerated individuals who had their right to vote restored by Amendment 4 in 2018. Disenfranchisement hurts families and young people, particularly in urban communities and communities of color.
- **Polling place closures & in-accessible polling places for college students:** In New York, students at Bard College had to sue to get a polling site on their campus for the 2020 election after a decade of intimidation and suppression in Dutchess County. In the 2020 presidential primary, students at the Texas Southern University-a historically Black College- waited on 6 hour lines to vote. This was caused in-part by the State Legislature's recent effort to eliminate mobile early voting sites on college campuses and close hundreds of poll sites in Black and Brown communities.

# BUILDING A NEW YOUTH VOTING RIGHTS MOVEMENT

After three months of research, interviews with dozens of voting rights leaders across the country, our team decided to launch GenVote Action and a new chapter for GenVote in 2020. Based on our discovery process, there seems to be firm consensus that a new movement is necessary to make youth voting rights a national “base-building” issue for our generation.

**To meet the moment, GenVote is frontloading a new youth-led movement that defends and advances voting rights for our generation.** We are “frontloading” a grand strategy, structure, and story for a national, voting rights movement that meets the needs of the most diverse and politically active generation that our country has ever seen. Frontloading is an intense (but critical) strategic planning process for organizers who want to launch unified, but autonomous, movements to mass scale and activate active popular support from the public.

To build a new youth voting rights movement, we initiated the frontloading process in December 2019 and started to build our movement DNA in a series of preliminary workshops with GenVote core members and Board members throughout the winter of 2020.



GenVote is an inaugural member of the **Momentum Community's first frontloading cohort program**. Momentum is a training institute and movement incubator seeding a new wave of movements. Previous participants in Momentum trainings come from groups doing some of the most important movement-building in the U.S., including the founders of the *Sunrise Movement, Cosecha, If Not Now, Dream Defenders and Black Lives Matter*. The frontloading cohort was officially launched in September 2020 and will end in June 2021.

In 2021, we will work with an incredible new Frontloading team of college and high school students, young professionals, community organizers and voting rights experts to build a new agenda for youth voting rights and launch our movement.

# Addendum

## THE NY YOUTH VOTING RIGHTS & ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM 2019-2020

- **Enact Automatic Voter Registration.** The State Legislature should pass the Automatic Voter Registration Act, which will boost youth turnout and remove barriers to registration for young voters.
- **Codify Rights Restoration of People on Parole.** The State Legislature should pass S1931/A4987, which will allow those leaving incarceration on parole to vote and provide opportunities to register upon release from prison.
- **Extend Time Off to Vote for Schools.** The State Legislature should expand the closure of public schools, including public institutions of higher education, on Election Day (beyond New York City). Alternatively, public and private institutions of higher education should declare Election Day a “university holiday” and develop policies allowing students and employees to be excused from class to vote.
- **Lower the Voting Age to 16 for State and Local Elections.** The State Legislature should lower the voting age to 16 for local and state elections.
- **Mandate On-Campus Poll Sites.** The State Legislature should mandate General Election on-campus polling locations at colleges or universities. In the wake of early voting, the State Legislature should also expand the mandate to establish early voting locations at public colleges or universities.
- **Expand Registration and Civic Engagement Practices at SUNY/CUNY Schools.** The State Legislature should expand civic engagement practices at CUNY/SUNY schools with a new student voter empowerment act.
- **Change Closed Primaries to Open Primaries.** The State Legislature should amend the Election Code so that voters not enrolled in a party can vote in primary elections.
- **Establish Youth Representation in State Government.** The State Legislature should establish a youth advisory council. Alternatively, the Governor’s Office could create a youth advisory council program to advise executive agencies and educate young people about the role of executive agencies in state government.
- **Lower the Age Requirement to 16 for Poll Workers.** The State Legislature should amend the Election Code to lower the voting age requirement for poll workers to 16 and make it accessible for young people enrolled in school to work half-day shifts as paid poll workers.
- **Democracy Vouchers for NYC High School Students.** The New York City Council should create a democracy vouchers program for students attending public and private high schools in New York City