

Better Ballots NY: 2010 New York Voter Education Guide

1. In New York City, over 37,000 people are homeless; and for 43 percent of households in the city, housing costs account for over 30 percent of income.

- **What should the state do about the lack of access to safe, affordable housing for the lowest-income New Yorkers – including those struggling with mental illness, physical disabilities, addiction, or reentry from jail or prison?**

- Restore federal housing aid to homeless New Yorkers.
- Repeal punitive rules that eject homeless families from NYC shelters.
- Extend NYC rental subsidy program, Advantage, beyond two years.
- Establish a State Rental Subsidy Program for households below 150% of poverty line.
- Home Rule on rent control – local, not state, regulation of local rents.
- Repeal vacancy decontrol.
- End statutory vacancy bonus.
- End automatic rent-increases by the Maximum Base Rent formula.
- Appoint NYC's Rent Guidelines Board by City Council, not just the Mayor .
- Place Mitchell Lama and Project Based Section 8 units into rent-stabilization upon exit from these subsidy programs.

2. In some states, people convicted of a felony can lose the right to vote while incarcerated, on parole, on probation — or even for good. In Kentucky and Virginia, the loss of this right is permanent, short of government pardon. In Maine and Vermont, a person never loses this right in his or her home district, even while incarcerated. In New York, those convicted of a felony cannot vote while in prison or on parole.

- **What are your views on voting rights for people in prison New York State?**
- **What are your views on voting rights for people on Parole in New York State?**

New York's prisoners and parolees (except for conviction for treason) should have the right to vote from their home districts in all public elections. Voting is important to rehabilitation and social reintegration. Blacks and Latinos are 31% of NY's population, but 82% of prisoners and parolees, resulting in over 100,000 disenfranchised. That's more than enough disempower minority communities politically and swing statewide elections. “Felon disenfranchisement laws have been more effective in eliminating black voters in the age of mass incarceration than they were during Jim Crow.” (Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*).

3. New York’s prison population has decreased by 20 percent – from 72,899 to 57,139 – in the last decade According to the Department of Correctional Services, there are over 5,000 empty beds in its system. Given that the prison population will likely decline further in 2010, and

given the state's budget deficit, closing underutilized prisons has been suggested as a way to save money and avoid cuts to other services.

- **What are your views on closing New York prisons that are running below capacity?**

We should close underutilized prisons and invest the savings in sustainable economic development in the upstate communities which have grown dependent on incarceration and the low-income inner city communities from which most of the prisoners come. We should reduce the prison population further and close more prisons by fully repealing the Rockefeller Drug Laws, reducing reincarceration for technical parole violations, increasing the use of work release, increasing the parole release rate, expanding merit time eligibility, and increasing funding for rehabilitation, re-entry, and community-based alternatives to imprisonment like job training and drug treatment that are more effective and less expensive.

4. Each year, over 120,000 people are released from New York's jails and prisons. For formerly incarcerated persons, securing a job is critical to successful reentry into society. However, many employers will not hire persons who have a criminal record, despite laws against discrimination.

- **How should the State promote employment for job-seekers who have criminal records?**
- **How can the private sector be encouraged to help with this?**

The state should establish a full employment program: jobs at living wages for all willing and able to work. Private jobs are good, but public jobs are necessary for full employment. Unemployed people would go their local employment office – not unemployment office – and take a job that meets unmet needs determined by that community. The local community would plan the jobs in public works and services. The state would fund them out of progressive taxes. This public jobs program would enable ex-offenders to establish a work record that qualifies them for jobs and advancement in the private sector.

5. In 2009, the New York City Police Department conducted a record 575,304 stops as part of its stop-and-frisk policy. Of those stopped 87 percent were Black and Latino. .The NYPD claims this policy has reduced crime, but many civil rights and community groups have criticized it as inefficient and racially biased.

- **What are your views on the NYPD's stop-and-frisk practices?**
- **What steps should the city and/or NYPD take to improve relations between the police and residents, particularly in communities of color?**

We must have community control of the police. We must reform NYC Civilian Complaint Review Board into a Citizen Review Board – police are not military. We must reinvigorate it with new leadership. It should have community offices throughout the city accessible to the people.

Responsibility for prosecuting and punishing police misconduct should be the board's, not the Police Commissioner's. It should have policy reform authority to, for example, end stop-and-frisk racial profiling. It should be fully funded. As governor, I will advocate these policies for NYC and other communities and support state legislation to enable and fund these policies.