NYS Memo of Support

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

TO: Members of the New York State Legislature

FROM: Brian Kanarek, Community Growth

DATE: November 18, 2025

SUBJECT: Support for S._____ / A.____, An Act to amend the education law, in relation to

foundational legal literacy.

We urge you to co-sponsor this vital piece of legislation that ensures New York's students

are prepared for the legal and financial responsibilities of adulthood. This bill provides the

practical, real world knowledge that is the missing piece in our civics education.

THE PROBLEM: A PRACTICAL SKILLS GAP

Current law, Section 801-a rightfully requires schools to teach abstract principles like

"personal responsibility" and "observance of laws." However, students are graduating without the

foundational knowledge to practice those principles. They are signing leases, taking jobs, and

entering contracts without ever being taught what those documents mean.

THE SOLUTION: A STRATEGIC, NO-COST AMENDMENT

This bill provides the solution by amending Section 801-a to include foundational legal literacy.

PRACTICAL SKILLS: It ensures students are taught the basics of contracts, leases, employment

law, consumer rights, and the justice system.

PRESERVES LOCAL CONTROL: This bill respects home rule. It gives schools the flexibility

to integrate this curriculum into existing social studies or economics classes.

LINKS TO EXISTING PROGRAMS: It directly supports the state's Seal of Civic Readiness by

creating a new pathway for students to earn the Seal.

EXPERT LED: It creates a Foundational Legal Literacy Advisory Council composed of unpaid experts from the New York State Bar, business, labor, and tenant groups to ensure the curriculum is non partisan, high quality, and developed at no cost to the state.

This bill is a common sense, pro responsibility, and pro stability proposal. It creates a vital pathway to public service and an empowered citizenry. We urge an AYE vote.

YS Bill (S.A.)
TATE OF NEW YORK
·
N SENATE
ovember 18, 2025
atroduced by Senread twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be emmitted to the Committee on Education
N ASSEMBLY
ovember 18, 2025
troduced by M. of Aread once and referred to the Committee on ducation

to amend the education law, in relation to incorporating foundational legal literacy into the existing curriculum for civility, citizenship and character education.

AN ACT

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Legislative intent. The legislature finds that section 801-a of the education law, which provides for instruction in civility, citizenship, and character education, forms a critical part of a student's development. This existing law rightfully mandates instruction in principles such as "personal responsibility" and "observance of laws and rules."

The Legislature finds that true civic empowerment requires legal and financial literacy.

The ability to understand a binding contract is as essential to modern citizenship as the ability to read. Preparing students for this reality is essential to the health of our American community.

This act is intended to give practical, real world meaning to these existing mandates, thereby empowering students to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens, consumers, and tenants.

Furthermore, the legislature intends for this program to serve as a vital feeder into public service, justice, and civic leadership, inspiring and preparing a new, diverse generation to understand and uphold the rule of law.

- **Section 2.** Curriculum. Section 801-a of the education law is amended by adding a new subdivision 2 and renumbering subdivisions 2 and 3 to be subdivisions 3 and 4, respectively, to read as follows:
- 2. All public high schools shall include a comprehensive course in "Foundational Legal Literacy" as a requirement for graduation. As a component of the instruction required in subdivision one of this section, and to provide pupils with the practical knowledge to exercise "personal responsibility" and the "observance of laws and rules," such instruction shall include a program in foundational legal literacy.
- (a) The commissioner shall, by rule and regulation, provide that such programs be integrated within existing social studies, economics, or other approved courses and be provided to pupils in grades nine through twelve.
- (b) Such program shall be age appropriate and shall include, but not be limited to, the following core topics:
- (i) The rule of law: Understanding the principles of the legal system, the structure of the state and federal judiciary, and the separation of powers.

- (ii) Contracts and consumer law: The essential elements of a binding contract, independent contractor agreements, consumer rights, warranties, analysis of debt instruments, deceptive practices, and economic defense against predatory lending practices.
- (iii) Leases and property: The fundamental rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, including the components of a lease.
- (iv) Employment and labor law: The legal differences between an employee and an independent contractor, at will employment, wage and hour laws, and workplace discrimination.
- (v) The civil and criminal justice process: The basic steps of a civil lawsuit, including small claims court, and the foundational principles of the criminal justice system.
- (vi) Jurisdictional Competence: The distinction between municipal, state, and federal law.
- (vii) Civic Agency: The mechanics of voting and community board participation.
- (c) There is hereby established the "Foundational Legal Literacy Advisory Council" (hereinafter referred to as 'the council') to advise the commissioner and the board of regents. The council shall consist of eleven members:
 - (1) the commissioner of education, or their designee, who shall serve as chairperson,
 - (2) one member appointed by the governor,
 - (3) one member appointed by the president of the senate,
 - (4) one member appointed by the speaker of the assembly,
 - (5) one member appointed by the New York State Bar Association,
 - (6) one member representing a nonprofit legal services organization,
 - (7) one member representing a statewide tenant advocacy organization,
 - (8) one member representing a statewide business organization,
 - (9) one member representing a consumer protection organization,

- (10) one member representing a state employee organization representing teachers, and
- (11) one member representing a school administrators' organization.
- (d) The council shall meet at least quarterly during its first two years of operation, and at least twice per year thereafter. All members shall serve without compensation. The council shall make recommendations to the commissioner regarding the development of the curriculum, instructional resources, and professional development required to implement this program. The commissioner shall, in consultation with the council, promulgate all rules and regulations necessary for the implementation of this subdivision.
- (e) Successful completion of this program of instruction in foundational legal literacy shall be deemed a qualifying component for students seeking to obtain the New York State "Seal of Civic Readiness."

Section 3. **Rule of Construction**. Nothing in this act shall be construed to require any school district to use a specific, state developed curriculum or instructional material, nor to supersede the authority of the board of education or trustees of a school district to determine the details of its instructional program, provided that such program meets the requirements of subdivision two of section 801-a of the education law as added by this act.

Section 4. Severability. If any provision of this act, or the application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held to be invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of this act which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

Section 5. This act shall take effect on the first of July next succeeding the date on which it shall have become a law, and shall apply to all school years commencing on or after such date.