



Dear Senator,

Last fall Massachusetts voters in cities across the Commonwealth waited in lines of up to two hours to cast their votes. Others understandably could not wait that long and went home. Still others were turned away because of issues around inactive voting lists, registration glitches, and their inability to legally obtain an absentee ballot. Massachusetts should be a leader in dealing with these and other problems that put unnecessary roadblocks in front of legitimate voters. Indeed, Massachusetts lags behind much of the country in election modernization—even those states that recently rolled back their laws often have advances that have never been law here.

The bill recently passed by the House (H.3772), which included on-line voter registration and a modest early voting provision, is a significant step forward. But it does not fully meet the goal of modernizing our elections. Only a comprehensive election reform package would do that. In addition to the provisions the House passed, we are asking the Senate to also include, at a minimum, the provisions passed by the House last year (post-election audits and pre-registration) along with some technical changes that would make a big impact. We also believe that Election Day Voter Registration is the most impactful reform that you could enact, and we hope that you will consider adding it to this package.

Massachusetts trails much of the country in voting modernization laws that will encourage more participation in elections and we need to catch up. Below are some more specifics on the provisions we would like you to add to H. 3772

Post- election audits are a top priority that should be added back into the bill.

Post-election audits ensure that vote counts are accurate and that voting machines are working properly. Twenty-six other states perform post-election audits and California has conducted audits for more than 30 years. This reform is a common-sense business practice that will instill greater voter confidence in the integrity of our elections and can uncover important information about voting machine malfunctions and other voting inaccuracies. Audits can be funded with federal dollars through the Help America Vote Act that have already been allocated to Massachusetts. As Charles Stewart, a voting technology expert at MIT, says: “Post-election audits of voting machines are best-practice among states who are interested in making sure that the machines remain in good shape and that election procedures were followed. Process audits

are part of any good business practice, and I'm puzzled why they haven't been adopted everywhere."

Pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds is another priority that should be added to the bill.

Pre-registration will increase voter participation among young voters, a demographic bloc with historically low voter participation. Based on the experience of other states, pre-registration would result in approximately 21,000 additional voter registrations per year, and increase voter turnout of 18- and 19-year-olds by 5 to 10%. Studies also show this increase in participation endures into adulthood. Pre-registration has been enacted in Alaska, California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon and Rhode Island. The program is easy to administer and is not costly. Here in Massachusetts, the current "pending" category for 17-year-olds who will turn 18 by Election Day would need to be reprogrammed. Young people 18-23 only move slightly more frequently than the general population and not as frequently as young adults aged 24-30, who are the most mobile demographic. In any given year, only 14% of young people 18-23 move, and those who go to college often vote in their hometowns. Amongst the general population the mobility percentage is only slightly lower, at 10%.

Early voting should be expanded.

The bill currently requires that all municipalities in Massachusetts have at least one early voting site at city or town hall and conduct early voting at their regularly scheduled business hours. Some towns have evening or weekend hours but many, including Boston, do not. Moreover, one early voting site only open from 9-5 is woefully inadequate for large cities. While there is nothing to prohibit municipalities from adding sites or hours, there is nothing to require it either. We suggest requiring Massachusetts largest communities to do better and to have an appropriate number of locations with evening and weekend hours.

Additional reforms should be considered.

Election Day Voter Registration— No other reform would be as effective in fixing administrative problems or in increasing voter participation. On average, states with Election Day Registration have turnout rates that are 10-12% higher than the national average. According to a 2009 report, Massachusetts would see approximately a 4.9% increase in turnout if it was enacted here. States that have passed Election Day Registration include: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and Washington DC.

Reform of inactive voting procedures— Massachusetts is the only state that makes a voter "inactive" after a one-time failure to return a city or town census form, regardless of how often the voter goes to the polls. Inactive voting procedures are confusing, slow down voting, and can wrongly disenfranchise voters.

Thank you for your consideration. We would appreciate your help in our effort to strengthen and then pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Carol Rose
Pam Wilmot
Anne Borg and Marilyn Peterson
Shannon Erwin
Tony Mack
Janet Domenitz
Cheryl Crawford
Deborah Shah

ACLU of Massachusetts
Common Cause Massachusetts
League of Women Voters MA
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Massachusetts Voter Table
MASSPIRG
MassVOTE
Progressive Massachusetts