



## Legislation Summary:

### An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement

Initial bill number: [S215/H2016](#) (Bill numbers will change as legislation proceeds.)

Sponsors: Sen. Harriette Chandler, Rep. Linda Dean Campbell

This bill introduces a rigorous student-led project-based approach to civics, and requires civic education and engagement in K-12. Such programs are to be supported by a Civics Project Fund to be administered by the Massachusetts Department of Education to implement this program.

Legislators, the LWVMA Education Committee, the state's civic education advocates, and academics have been working on requiring civic learning and engagement for over eight years. Our collaborative work with the civic education community has brought the Massachusetts Department of Education to engage, and it is now moving forward on civic learning and engagement in K-12 education. The bill summarizes the Department of Education's recommendations from its most recently completed report on the state of civic learning and what strategy they are recommending.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) established the Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement and it published a report in 2015, *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement*. In response to this report the Department created the Task Force on Civic Learning and Engagement and the outcome of this group is the *Civic Learning and Engagement Strategic Plan* which was presented to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in April 2017. This bill coordinates an approach to supporting civic education that is consistent with the recommendations of this strategic plan.

In reviewing this bill, LWVMA's Legislative Action Committee discussed a number of recommendations for the bill's sponsors and the Joint Committee on Education.

**Civics Project Fund:** The committee feels civics education in our schools should be funded by the state as part of the core curriculum and not be dependent on outside fundraising to provide professional development and curriculum.

**Student-Led Projects:** The committee does not support making student-led civics projects a requirement for graduation. We do support experiential civics learning and feel that every school district should include at least two student-led civics projects at different grade levels integrated into existing **required** course curriculum within the K-12 school program and that students should complete those projects. We support integrating those projects with various subject areas, not just social studies.

**Media Literacy:** We would encourage the bills' sponsors and the joint committee to include in civic engagement and learning legislation some version of the recommendations in Sen. Eric Lesser's bill, S.278, to "encourage school districts to implement instruction in news media literacy skills at all grade

levels, and in any of the core subjects or other subjects, to equip students with the knowledge and skills for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating all types of news media, including print, online, television, and social media.”

Edward M. Kennedy Civics Challenge: The committee recommends against this provision of the bill as part of a law. We feel the number of students qualifying for the top honor is very likely to far exceed 100, so that it becomes just a lottery competition.

High School Voter Challenge: While we encourage high school students to register to vote, we do not favor a legislative prescription for how schools should accomplish this.

**League Position:** LWVUS positions on Citizens Rights, which is one of the cornerstones for the League’s work since its founding.