

**For Immediate Release**

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# Massachusetts Senate passes comprehensive election modernization

## **Election Modernization Coalition Applauds Passage of Comprehensive Election Modernization in Senate**

### *House should pass and the Governor should sign the Senate bill*

The Election Modernization Coalition today applauded the Massachusetts Senate for overwhelmingly passing comprehensive election modernization legislation. The final vote was 37 in favor to 1 opposed. The bill includes online voter registration, early voting, pre-registration for 16 year-olds, post-election audits of voting machines, Election Day registration, permanent voter registration and inactive voting reform. Legislation to establish early voting and online voter registration passed the Massachusetts House of Representatives late last year. The House passed pre-registration and post-election audits in the last legislative session.

“We are thrilled,” said Pam Wilmot, Executive Director of Common Cause Massachusetts. “We have been fighting for many of these reforms for a decade or more. If they all reach the Governor’s desk, Massachusetts will be a clear leader in establishing modern voting laws that are efficient, effective, and engage more citizens.”

“The time has come to make these vital election modernizations. Early voting, pre-registration, online voter registration and Election Day registration will make our elections more accessible by expanding access and participation in our elections,” said Barry Finegold, Senate Chairman of the Election Law Committee.

“At a time when voting rights are under attack across the country, it’s great to see the Senate take a stand to expand access to voting,” said Sara Brady, MassVOTE Policy Director. “This victory will engage many more people in the most important activity of a democracy – voting.”

If the Senate bill is passed by the House and signed by the Governor, Massachusetts would join 19 other states in passing online voter registration. Early voting is currently allowed in 32 states. Thirteen states including our neighbors in New Hampshire, Connecticut and Maine have passed Election Day registration and 14 have adopted pre-registration of teens (age varies in states).

“Massachusetts has been behind the curve, but these reforms would make us a national leader in ensuring free, fair and accessible elections. They would be the biggest voting rights victory in Massachusetts in a generation,” added Gavi Wolfe of the Massachusetts ACLU.

“The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is pleased that the Senate has passed this significant update to the state’s election laws. Many of the provisions make it easier to register to vote and easier to cast a ballot. In this increasingly complicated world, these are critical goals,” said Anne Borg, LWVMA co-president.

“This is a great bill,” said Deborah Shah, Executive Director of Progressive Massachusetts. “We are especially pleased that Election Day registration has once again passed the Senate. No other reform encourages voter engagement as effectively as Election Day registration. We urge the House to accept the Senate version of the bill and send it to the Governor as soon as possible.”

“The right to vote is a strong motivator for new Americans to undertake the long and difficult process of naturalization, and these reforms help protect that right in a number of ways that will enhance citizen voters’ engagement,” said Eva Millona, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA).

The Election Modernization Coalition is comprised of 45 advocacy groups and led by ACLU Massachusetts, Common Cause Massachusetts, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, MASSPIRG, MassVOTE, the MA Voter Table, the MIRA Coalition, and Progressive Massachusetts.

#### Background on bill provisions:

##### **Online voter registration.**

Online voter registration will reduce processing time, cut costs, decrease errors, and encourage more people to register. After Arizona implemented online voter registration, registration rates rose by 9.5% and costs decreased from 83¢ for processing a paper registration to 3¢ for online applications. The online system would search the Registry of Motor Vehicles database for the applicant’s driver’s license and other identifying information and match it to the electronic form. Newly registered voters would be required to show proof of residence the first time they vote. Online voter registration has been passed in 20 states.

##### **Early voting.**

Early voting would allow Massachusetts residents to vote in person up ten business days before Election Day, at city or town hall or at a satellite site. Early voting relieves congestion on Election Day, especially during typical peak times before and after normal work hours, and allows voters the flexibility to fit voting into busy schedules, particularly voters with lengthy commutes or non-traditional work schedules. Early voting is available in 32 states.

##### **Post-election audits.**

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. In 2012, a post-election audit discovered a programming error which caused the results in several municipal elections in Florida to flip. 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 that have already been allocated to Massachusetts through the Help America Vote Act.

### **Pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds.**

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 continues into adulthood. The program is easy to administer and has almost no cost. Pre-registration has been enacted in Alaska, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.

### **Election Day registration.**

No other reform is as effective in fixing administrative problems or increasing voter participation. On average, states with Election Day registration have turnout rates that are 10-12% higher than the national average. States that have passed Election Day registration include: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, 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 on Election Day, and can wrongly disenfranchise voters.