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BOSTON-- October 19, 2016 – On the eve of Massachusetts’ first experience with early voting, beginning October 24th, the Massachusetts Election Modernization Coalition today honored 201 of the state’s 351 municipalities with Gold and Silver Medals for offering voters substantial early voting options.

“We are thrilled that so many communities have stepped up to go beyond the minimum required by law and are offering evening and weekend early voting hours,” said Pam Wilmot, executive director of Common Cause Massachusetts during a Coalition press conference and ‘medal ceremony’ at the State House. “Early voting promises to shorten long lines at busy polling places, improve the voting experience, and give Massachusetts citizens more opportunities to participate in democracy,” she said.

The Coalition campaigned for passage of the 2014 Election Modernization Law that established early voting and other reforms. Last fall, it launched the **Early Voting Challenge** to encourage municipalities to go beyond the floor set by the law (one location operating during business hours) and meet the Coalition’s [recommended standards](#), based on a Common Cause report on [best practices from other states](#).

“The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is proud to have worked with this coalition to bring robust early voting to Massachusetts,” said Meryl Kessler, executive director. “And we are inspired by all of the cities and towns who went above and beyond the minimum requirements of the early voting law to ensure that voters throughout the state will have a convenient, flexible, and positive voting experience in 2016.”

The Coalition awarded Gold Medals to 34 communities that offer one early voting site for every 35,000, at least two evenings of weeknight voting for each week in the early voting period, and six or more hours of weekend voting. 167 municipalities earned the Silver Medal for offering an adequate number of sites, at least one weeknight of evening voting each week in the two-week early voting period, and four or more hours of weekend voting. Towns under 10,000 people qualified with three hours on the weekend.

“Today we celebrate the cities and towns that have embraced early voting,” said Rahsaan Hall, director of the Racial Justice Program at the ACLU of Massachusetts. “We believe that voting is the cornerstone of our democracy and the fundamental right upon which all our civil liberties

rest. By increasing access to the polls through early voting we ensure that as many citizens as possible have a voice in the preservation and growth of our democracy. Communities with significant numbers of people of color, people living under the poverty threshold and English language learners, who have been historically underrepresented in electoral politics, will benefit the most from this very necessary modification of our voting practices.”

Sophia Hall, staff attorney for the non-profit legal organization, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice echoed the sentiment. “The Lawyers' Committee’s mission is to provide a safeguard for the civil, social and economic liberties of residents throughout the Commonwealth. On behalf of the communities of color and low-income communities that we serve who disproportionately utilize early voting, we applaud each awardee for their efforts to expand access to the ballot box,” she said.

Cheryl Crawford of MassVOTE added, “MassVOTE was founded to fight for political, racial and economic equality with a mission to increase voter turnout, modernize election laws and engage the next generation. We have been working to address these challenges by educating residents on early voting, and convincing others to become more civically engaged in this critical program.”

Beth Huang from the Massachusetts Voter Table said that early voting will, “help make the voices heard of the Rising Massachusetts Electorate, especially in communities of color and among low-income people, young people, women, and new citizens.”

MASSPIRG Education Fund executive director Janet Domenitz agreed. “For more than 40 years, MASSPIRG has been campaigning to make democracy more transparent and more accessible—particularly for our youth, in whose hands the future lies. Early voting is one tool that helps us realize that goal.”

The Coalition plans to monitor the early voting process and will make recommendations on improving it for future elections.

For more information, including a list of awardees, please go to www.earlyvotingma.com.

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The Election Modernization Coalition is made up of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, Common Cause Massachusetts, the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, MassVOTE, and more.