May 29, 2018

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As organizations that believe in citizen participation in government, we thank you for your support of H.4320, Automatic Voter Registration and request that you bring the bill to a vote as soon as possible. The end of the session is fast approaching, and we are concerned this bill will run out of time. In order for Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) to be in place for the next Presidential election in 2020, it must be enacted this session—next year would be too late—and that means getting it out of the House and on to the Senate in time to get it to the Governor's desk before August.

For many of the 64 organizations that are part of our Coalition, AVR is a top legislative priority. The bill is quite popular in the legislature, with 85 House co-sponsors and 23 Senate co-sponsors. It is now in House Ways and Means after receiving a favorable report from the Joint Committee on Election Laws. The Town Clerks Association has said clerks are "fine" with the bill and support its goals. Secretary Galvin is on board, and the minority party is also supportive.

A description of the legislation is below and a flyer attached.

Automatic Voter Registration has already been approved in 13 other states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia) and is working well in those that have implemented it. Oregon, the first state to implement the reform in 2016, added over 375,000 new voters to the rolls in the first 18 months and updated 265,000 inaccurate addresses in just six months. More than 97,000 new voters participated in the 2016 election because of AVR, resulting in a 4.1 percent increase in voter turnout—one of the largest increases in the country.

Automatic Voter Registration will cost Massachusetts virtually nothing to implement. In Colorado, AVR implementation was so minimal that the state did not even assign it a cost. In Vermont, the modest expense for updated software ($473,000) was covered by funds already appropriated by the federal government. Here in Massachusetts, we have $43 million already set aside by the federal government for voting improvements like AVR, a fund controlled by Secretary Galvin.

As we approach the mid-term elections, and with the next Presidential election only two years away, we need to do all we can to protect and expand democracy. Automatic Voter Registration will make our civic duty to vote more accurate, more secure, and more available to all. It's a win for democracy, it's a win for security, and it's a win for voters.

Please do what you can to bring Automatic Voter Registration to a vote as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Pam Wilmot, Common Cause Massachusetts
Janet Domenitz, MASSPIRG
Mary Ann Ashton, League of Women Voters Massachusetts
Gavi Wolfe, ACLU of Massachusetts
Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, MassVOTE
Jonathan Cohn, Progressive Massachusetts
Beth Huang, Massachusetts Voter Table
Leslie Sears, Action Together MA
Michael Canavan, American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts
Sheila Irvin, Berkshire Democratic Brigades
Diane Provenz, Berkshire Women's Action Group
Jessica Tang and Johnny McInnis, Boston Teachers Union
Sovanna Pouv, the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association
Genevieve Coyle, Cambridge Democratic Committee
Karen Chen, Chinese Progressive Association
Joel Wool, Clean Water Action
James Davis, Democracy for America Massachusetts
Adam Eichen, Equal Citizens
Lisa Danetz, ForwardMA
Megan Whilden, Four Freedoms Coalition
Holly Morse, Green Tea Party
Indivisible (many chapters)
Cindy Rowe, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Gillian Mason and Lily Huang, Jobs With Justice
Lew Finfer, Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Amy Grunder, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Emily Norton, Massachusetts Sierra Club
Grace Johnson, MIT Graduate Student Council
Rebekah Gewirtz, National Association of Social Workers - Massachusetts Chapter
Maria Elena Letona, Neighbor to Neighbor
Noemi Ramos, New England United for Justice
Shawn Fitzgibbons, Newton Democratic City Committee
Liz Reardon, Our Revolution Massachusetts
John Lippitt, Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Zac Bears, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts
Frances Moore Lappé, Small Planet Institute
Laura Wagner, Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network
Adam Friedman, Voter Choice MA

How Automatic Voter Registration Works

Automatic Voter Registration is very simple. When Massachusetts residents get a new or updated driver's license or change their address with MassHealth, their information would be matched electronically with the central voter registry run by the State Secretary. If a resident is eligible to vote but not registered—or registered at a different address—the information would be updated and the person would be registered to vote unless they decline. Only information from U.S. citizens would be forwarded to the Secretary and to local clerks. Noncitizens are automatically deleted and would not be registered.

AVR improves the safety and security of the voting process by improving the accuracy of our voting rolls and eliminating duplicate voters and voters who have moved out of state or died. The AVR bill will further clean up the rolls by updating them with the latest information from the RMV and MassHealth and by joining with 23 other states in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC). ERIC takes each state's voter file and compares it to every other member state's registration and department of motor vehicles records, as well as other databases including the U.S. Postal Service, death notices, and the Social Security Administration. ERIC then sends a detailed encrypted report back to the Secretary of State and local officials, who eliminate or update the erroneous records. This reduces the already very small risk of voters casting a ballot in multiple states or the virtually non-existent risk of voter impersonation. It also reduces costs to the state and political campaigns for mailing to and otherwise engaging with non-existent voters. To date, ERIC has helped voting officials eliminate the records of 8 million individuals who have relocated or died.