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Bill Would Expand Voting Options to Safeguard Massachusetts' Fall Elections

Working with a coalition of voting-rights organizations, [Rep. Michael Moran](#), Second Assistant Majority Leader, and [Rep. John Lawn](#), co-chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws, [yesterday filed legislation to boost voting options for this fall's elections](#). The legislation is sponsored in the Senate by Senators [Eric Lesser](#) and [Adam Hinds](#). Other representatives and senators will be asked to sign onto the bill later today.

To address concerns that coronavirus will make it difficult for voters to participate in fall elections, the bill will

- affirm that all voters may vote by absentee ballot in the September primary and November general elections out of concern about coronavirus;
- require the Secretary of State to establish a statewide online portal for voters to apply for and track the progress of absentee ballots;
- allow two weeks of early voting before the September primary, and three weeks of early voting before the November election;
- require the Secretary of State to mail ballots to all Massachusetts voters before the November election without an application required;
- allow election officials to scan absentee and early voting ballots in the clerk's offices when they are received – but results may not be calculated or announced until the polls close;
- change the deadline to register to vote or update voter registrations to 10 days before the election;
- allow general election ballots postmarked on or before November 3 to be counted, as long as they are received by November 13; and
- require the Secretary of State to issue regulations governing public health safeguards at early voting sites and polling places to protect voters and poll workers.

“It’s crucial that all voters have the opportunity to have their voices heard in this fall’s elections,” said **Common Cause Massachusetts Executive Director Pam Wilmot**. “This bill provides more options for voters, so we can all vote safely and securely this fall. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Representatives Lawn and Moran in structuring these solutions and sponsoring the legislation.”

“Covid-19 presents an unprecedented challenge to our election administration. I look forward to working together with advocates and my colleagues to ensure that all Massachusetts voters have the ability to express their freedom to vote this election cycle,” said **Rep. John Lawn, the bill’s lead sponsor**. “This Bill will provide for options to vote by mail, expand early voting and also provide the opportunity to vote at their local polling locations. We will also work to provide election day workers and voters to do this in the safest environment possible.”

“We live in unprecedented times and are doing everything possible to fight Covid-19 while working tirelessly to protect each other. That fight and work extends to the fall elections,” said **Second Assistant Majority Leader Michael Moran, a lead sponsor of the legislation**. “This bill gives voters more options for casting their ballot by mail and enhances protections for poll workers and voters on Election Day. This is made possible by leveraging various election reforms advanced by advocacy groups and passed by Speaker DeLeo and my colleagues over the last decade. Thank you to Representative John Lawn and all the advocates who worked so hard on crafting this legislation.”

"Voting is a sacred constitutional right and we have an obligation to make sure our elections will be conducted safely," said **Senator Eric Lesser**. "This legislation lays out a clear process for making sure the 2020 elections are conducted safely and with maximum participation."

“We need to offer people a variety of ways to vote safely, so that everyone’s vote is counted,” said **Pattye Comfort, Executive Director of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters**. “The League of Women Voters supports efforts to expand voting by mail as much as possible, but also believes that we need to provide in-person voting options that are safe for both voters and election workers.”

"This bill provides us the greatest opportunity to brace our fall elections for COVID19 in a practical, yet powerful manner," said **MassVOTE Executive Director Cheryl Clyburn Crawford**. "We have no doubt that policies like vote-by-mail will thrive this fall, and will ultimately encourage lawmakers to consider implementing these reforms in the long-term."

"As the saying goes, in crisis there is danger and there is opportunity. This bill seizes an opportunity to make our elections fairer and safer in 2020," said Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MASSPIRG.

“Lawyers for Civil Rights is proud to support this bill that directly affects the clear voting impediments highlighted by COVID-19 that have an exacerbating impact on communities of color and low-income communities,” said **Sophia Hall, Supervising Attorney, Lawyers for Civil Rights**.

“There’s never been an election season like the one we’re headed into this fall, and there’s no time to waste to make sure every ballot can be cast and counted,” said **Carol Rose, Executive Director of ACLU of Massachusetts**. “In 2020, mail-in voting has to be easy, accessible, and widespread, and Massachusetts must also expand in-person voting to maximize physical distancing and safeguard public health. The ACLU is particularly concerned about protecting voting rights for the elderly, people with disabilities, people of color, and low-income voters.”

"An inclusive democracy will help bring about a just recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency and the economic downturn. We will work hard to ensure that voters with limited English proficiency can access multilingual materials for voting from the safety of their homes, as required by this bill," said **Beth Huang, the Director of the Massachusetts Voter Table**, a coalition of community organizations.

Earlier this year, a [special law](#) allowed Massachusetts municipalities to delay their spring elections, allowed all voters to vote by mail in the spring elections, and extended voter registration deadlines until 10 days before those elections.

The bill filed by Representatives Lawn and Moran applies only to this year's September 1 primary and November 3 general election.

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The Election Modernization Coalition is comprised of the ACLU of Massachusetts, Common Cause Massachusetts, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, MASSPIRG, MassVOTE, the Massachusetts Voter Table, and Progressive Massachusetts.