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Yesterday's Primary Shattered Turnout Records

Temporary Law Expanding Vote by Mail and Early Voting Made High Participation Rates Possible Even During Pandemic, Should Be Made Permanent

BOSTON – Despite the pandemic, Massachusetts voters shattered turnout records in yesterday's statewide primary – thanks to an emergency law championed by the Election Modernization Coalition and passed by the state Legislature earlier this summer.

The legislation – An Act Relative to Voting Options During COVID-19¹ – was necessary to keep Massachusetts' fall elections safe, secure, and available to all voters. It expanded vote by mail and early voting, for both yesterday's primary and the upcoming November general election.

"Expanded mail voting helped over a million Bay Staters have their voices heard in yesterday's election, from the safety of their own homes. It also has deepened political participation by engaging voters in down-ballot races that too often see low participation - between 8.84 and 12 percent in similar primaries," said **Kristina Mensik, Assistant Director of Common Cause Massachusetts**. "It's clear to us that – as the Secretary of the Commonwealth has also said - vote by mail and early voting for primaries must be here to stay."

As shown in the chart below, the only time in the past 70 years that more than 1 million votes were cast in the September primary of a presidential election year (rather than a gubernatorial election year) was in 1984 -- when 1,122,159 votes were cast. As of Wednesday morning, 1,469,974 votes were cast in yesterday's Senate primary², surpassing 1984 by nearly 350,000

¹ <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H4820>

² The AP reported 1,239,374 voters participated in the Democratic primary and 230,600 in the Republican Primary. Sources: https://www.bostonglobe.com/elections/2020/primary/massachusetts/democratic/us-senate/?p1=BG_election_2020_sidenav
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votes. Those figures are likely to go up throughout the day - but show participation rates already three to four times higher than in 2016.

The legislation was [signed into law by Governor Baker](#) on July 6. Since then, the 130 organizations in the Safe Elections Network have conducted a robust public education campaign, including a voter resources website: <https://www.safeelectionsma.org/> The Network's informational campaign will extend into the fall for the November general election.

"We have an extraordinary team of organizations within the Safe Elections Network which has done incredible work educating their members and communities, hosting and participating in phone banks multiple times a week, and giving all they've got to educate voters, especially in our low-income and Black communities and communities of color," said **Beth Huang, Director of the Massachusetts Voter Table**. "The awesome turnout we saw yesterday is a product of their work, too."

The law expanding mail voting and early primary voting is set to expire on December 31, 2020 and thereby only applies to this fall's elections.

"The record breaking numbers speak for themselves -- these temporary voting changes have been a huge success, and should be made permanent," said **Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MASSPIRG**. "Our government 'by the people' works better when more people participate by voting. These changes made it possible to break voter turnout records in the middle of a pandemic – and we want the increase in voter participation to continue, after the pandemic is over."

In a media interview on Saturday, the Secretary of the Commonwealth said "...some form.." of mail voting is "here to stay."³

The Safe Elections Network is collecting information from voters and elections officials on the challenges and successes of yesterday's election, including data such as the number of voters who requested mail ballots but voted in person, reports of incorrect ballots delivered, and the number of voters who successfully used the 'same day registration' window during early voting. "We urge the Secretary of the Commonwealth to release the data quickly," said **Sophia Hall, Supervising Attorney of Lawyers for Civil Rights**, "The numbers can help guide our voter outreach efforts for the November election, and help show the Legislature why these changes should be made permanent."

"We salute the voters of Massachusetts for their determination to be heard in these difficult times and look forward to informing voters and encouraging another record turnout for the November election," said **Patty Comfort, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts**.

³ <https://www.wcvb.com/article/on-the-record-william-galvin-gives-update-on-mail-in-early-in-person-voting/33842717>

“This election season is one of the most consequential in our lifetime, especially for Black voters and other voters of color,” said **Rahsaan Hall, Racial Justice Program Director, ACLU of Massachusetts**. “We need to learn from the primaries and make sure both mail-in voting and in-person voting are seamless in November.”

“Voter turnout in the September 1 Primary makes one thing abundantly clear– vote by mail should be here to stay,” said **Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, Executive Director at MassVOTE**. “As many as one million individuals - if not more - cast their ballots by mail. Due in great part to expanded mail voting, voter turnout in a state primary reached its highest level in decades. While multiple competitive elections certainly contributed to this increased turnout, one factor proved critical – all registered voters could safely, easily, and freely cast their ballots from home. Since voters automatically received applications, they faced fewer burdens in the voting process. That is fantastic, and should be the type of model we emulate moving forward”

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The Election Modernization Coalition includes Common Cause/MA, MassVOTE, the ACLU of Massachusetts, MASSPIRG, Mass Voter Table, Lawyers for Civil Rights, and the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.

Organizations participating in the Safe Elections Network are listed at safeelectionsma.org

State Primaries before a Presidential Election

State Primary Year	Registered Voters	Total Votes Cast	Turnout Percentage
1956	2,671,369	848,880	31.78%
1960	2,720,359	860,474	31.63%
1964	2,723,598	946,864	34.77%
1968	2,591,051	682,210	26.33%

1972	2,880,478	737,026	25.59%
1976	2,912,001	854,781	29.35%
1980	2,963,467	744,520	25.12%
1984	3,029,010	1,122,159	37.05%
1988	2,969,506	478,757	16.12%
1992	3,120,186	951,940	30.51%
1996	3,281,677	388,695	11.84%
2000	3,837,370	360,062	9.38%
2004	3,960,797	455,128	11.49%
2008	4,050,428	567,406	14.01%
2012	4,180,918	519,259	12.42%
2016	4,366,712	386,175	8.84%
2020	4,581,312	1,469,974**	**32.08%

**This count is as of Wednesday, September 2nd at 10:00am. Data from <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elevoterturnoutstats/voterturnoutstats.htm>