



Legislation Summary:

An Act making voting administrative changes to create equitable systemic solutions (ACCESS Act)

Initial bill number(s): S.410

Sponsors: Sen. Cynthia Creem

An Act establishing same day registration of voters

H.688 Rep. Carmine Gentile

An Act decoupling the municipal census from voter registration

H.707 Rep. Frank Moran

An Act enforcing accessibility for voters with disabilities

H. 701 Rep. Kay Khan

An Act providing uniform mail voting forms

H. 656 Rep. Shirley Arriaga

What the bill does, why LWVMA supports or opposes it, and the League position relative to this bill.

The Senate bill contains four sections. In the House, each section of the Senate bill was filed as a separate bill. The language is the same in both House and Senate versions. Here are summaries of the four House bills; combined they make up the Senate bill, S.410.

H. 688: Same Day Registration Allows eligible individuals to register as voters at Election Day polling places and early voting sites and vote there, if they complete and sign an affidavit of registration and present specified identification. Violations are punishable by not more than 5 years imprisonment or a fine of not more than \$5,000, or both.

H. 707: Decouple Voter Registration from Municipal Census Not responding to the annual municipal census will no longer result in being dropped from the voting register (but the municipal census will continue for data collection and jury selection). Instead, voters' names will go on the inactive list if information that they have moved from the city or town is received from the U.S. Postal Service's national change of address program, from the multistate Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), or from official notice by another jurisdiction. Voters' names will remain on the inactive list – allowing them to vote on a regular ballot if they affirm continued residence in their city or town -- until

they fail to vote (or take other voting-related action) after two consecutive regular state general elections, including one presidential election (four years).

H. 701: Enforce Voting Accessibility Requires the Secretary of State to arrange inspection of all polling places and early voting sites at least once every four years to ensure compliance with federal and state disability accessibility laws, and to report on progress annually. Cities and towns not in compliance must take immediate action to comply and file a compliance plan, and the Attorney General can enforce compliance in court.

H. 656: Combine Mail Voting Forms Requires uniform mail voting applications, instructions, ballot styles, envelopes, and other papers and electronic documents, without distinguishing separate forms for early voting by mail and absentee voting.

These bills are a continuation of our efforts to make voting in Massachusetts more accessible and more equitable. The same day voter registration provision continues our support of this reform that was cut from the VOTES Act last session.

Massachusetts has made great strides in voting reforms, but there are still some barriers. The provisions in these bills will continue to improve voting in the state. Some 20 states already offer same day registration; it is time for us to join them. We do not see any basis for towns putting voters on an inactive voter list because they (or someone in their household) did not return the annual town census. It causes concern at the polls when people find they are not allowed to vote until they go to a separate desk and attest to their residence. If they do not have identification with them, they might not be allowed to vote. Our partners at the Disability Law Center encourage periodic audits of polling places to assure accessibility. And having two different application forms, ballot envelopes, instructions and other materials for mail and absentee ballots just makes it more complicated for clerks to administer elections.

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen's right that must be guaranteed. (LWVUS) (1982) The 1986 LWVUS Convention affirmed an essential element for protecting the right to vote was encouraging participation in the political process. The 1990 convention affirmed that the LWVUS should continue emphasis on protecting the right to vote by working to increase voter participation. LWVMA reaffirmed that. *Where We Stand* [Preface \(lwvma.org\)](http://lwvma.org) p.14