



Legislation Summary:

An Act to ensure gender parity and racial and ethnic diversity on public boards and commissions

Initial bill number(s): S.2016

Sponsors: Senator Jason M. Lewis

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

The proposed bill seeks to ensure that Massachusetts appointed public boards and commissions broadly reflect the general public with regard to gender and race. Fifty percent of board members would be required to be female. The racial and ethnic composition of each board must “at a minimum, reflect the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in the general population.” The governor’s office, with support from the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, would be responsible for collecting and compiling pertinent data annually and this data would be made public. There is a good faith clause for boards that are unable to meet the requirements of the legislation. A few boards are excluded for specific reasons.

Lack of gender parity in positions of power in the United States is a cultural issue that has received a considerable amount of attention and research. The consensus is that gender parity will not be accomplished in a reasonable amount of time without proactive efforts, including the passage of state laws. This bill is proposing to solve a gender and race imbalance on public boards and commissions where decisions occur that shape our policy and institutions. Proportional representation will allow for board room and commission decisions that reflect the needs of us all. Even though more women and people of color are in the pipeline after obtaining experience and education in their fields, the last 30 years has seen slow progress in closing this important disparity. The Women’s Power Gap (<https://www.womenspowergap.org/>) published a report in 2022 highlighting the disparities that exist on Massachusetts public boards and commissions. Although progress has been made, 56% of boards and commissions have not yet reached gender parity and women of color are greatly underrepresented compared to White women.

The League supports equal rights for all under state and federal law regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability. *Impact on Issues: Equality of Opportunity*, p.122

