



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Election Laws
in support of**

**S.410 An Act making voting administrative changes to create equitable systemic solutions
(ACCESS Act)**

H.688 An Act establishing same day registration of voters

H.707 An Act decoupling the municipal census from voter registration

H.701 An Act enforcing accessibility for voters with disabilities

H.656 An Act providing uniform mail voting forms

**By Nancy Brumback, LWVMA Elections and Voting Legislative Specialist
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Massachusetts has made great strides in voting reforms, including the VOTES Act that the Legislature passed last session, but unnecessary barriers to registering and voting remain. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, on behalf of our 44 local Leagues across the Commonwealth, strongly supports the provisions in the ACCESS Act, S.410, and the four related House bills, each presenting one provision of the Senate bill. The League believes that voting is a fundamental citizen's right that must be guaranteed. These bills are a continuation of our efforts to make voting in Massachusetts more accessible and more equitable.

Same Day Registration: As the name implies, same day registration allows eligible individuals to register to vote on Election Day and at early voting sites after they complete and sign an affidavit of registration and present specified identification. They can then vote.

In many states, a large percentage of those who use same day registration are already registered voters who discover when they arrive at the polls that an error in their registration may prevent their vote from being counted. Same day registration allows the voter to immediately correct the error so that their vote is guaranteed to be counted. Common errors that may prevent a vote from being counted include an administrative typo in a name or address or a failure to update a surname change after marriage.

Enacting same day registration will greatly reduce the need for provisional ballots at polling places, and the election officials currently handling provisional ballots can instead register people to vote. Over two-thirds of the provisional ballots issued in the 2022 election were ultimately rejected. Same day registration would have meant most of those citizens could have cast ballots that counted.

No eligible citizen should show up at the polls on Election Day and be turned away because of a typo in their address or a name change due to a recent marriage. Some 20 states already offer same day registration without problems or fraud; it is time for us to join them.

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). We do not see any basis for towns and cities putting voters on an inactive voter list because someone in their household did not return the annual town census. It causes confusion for voters and additional work for election officials when voters get to the polls, find they have been classified as inactive, and need to attest to their continued residence before they can receive a ballot. If they do not have identification with them, they might not be allowed to vote.

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).

Enforce Voting Accessibility: This provision requires the Secretary of the Commonwealth 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. We feel periodic and required audits of polling places will increase accessibility.

Combine Mail Voting Forms: This provision 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. Having two different sets of documents for mail and absentee ballots makes it more complicated for clerks to administer elections and increases the probability of inadvertent errors.

The League urges this committee to report favorably a bill encompassing all of these voting reforms. By doing so, you will remove some of the remaining barriers to registering and voting in our state and will improve the efficiency of the elections process. We look forward to supporting such a bill as a continuation of the progress Massachusetts has made in voting access.

Our democracy and its bedrock of public trust in free and fair elections is under attack as never before. It is crucial for Massachusetts to set an example as a state moving to increase—not decrease—access to the polls and secure elections. The times demand that Massachusetts goes on record as supporting and enhancing the ability of all citizens to vote.

Thank you for your consideration.