

The VOTES Act

S.2554 (Rep John Lawn and Sen. Cindy Creem)

All eligible citizens who want to vote should be able and encouraged to participate. However, barriers to the ballot and unequal voter participation keep us from being a truly representative democracy. The VOTES Act will remove those barriers, strengthen security and trust in our elections, and protect the right to vote.

When we remove barriers, more people participate and we all win. Vote-by-mail, expanded early voting, and a reduced registration deadline allowed a record number of Massachusetts citizens to make their voice heard in our democracy in 2020. With that lesson in mind, this bill is calling for:

- ✓ Vote-by-Mail
- ✓ Same Day Voter Registration
- ✓ Jail-Based Voting Reforms
- ✓ Early In-Person Voting
- ✓ Automatic Voter Registration Fix
- ✓ Implement Electronic Registration Information Center

MAIL-IN & EARLY VOTING

Elections should be accessible for everyone. Expanded voting options do just that- and in the 2020 elections, helped Massachusetts citizens set record voter participation. This increased access to voting was extremely popular - let's not go backwards.

SAME DAY REGISTRATION

No eligible voter should be turned away at the polls due to an error in or out- of-date voter registration. Same Day Voter Registration allows all eligible voters to register or update their registration in-person on Election Day.

JAIL-BASED VOTING REFORMS

Many incarcerated people are eligible voters who must have meaningful access to the ballot. Massachusetts sheriffs must be responsible for ensuring those citizens serving misdemeanor convictions or held pre-trial who maintain the right to vote can access ballot applications, eligibility information, and materials.

Key Facts

- A record 3.7 million votes were cast in Massachusetts 2020 Election. Over half were early or mail ballots.
- 43 States and D.C. have universal vote by mail.
- 45 states made expanded mail voting available in 2020.
- SDR is already used in 21 states and D.C.
- Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire have used SDR for decades.
- SDR is mostly used by voters who need to update their registration, who would otherwise be excluded from participating on Election Day.
- Every year, 7-9,000 MA residents are held pre-trial or on misdemeanor convictions, and face barriers to voting though they maintain the right to vote.
- At one county jail, 13 out of an estimated 300-400 eligible voters cast a ballot this fall. That's between 3.2-4.2% of eligible voters.
- The absence of reporting requirements for jails and the Department of Corrections hides the exact estimate of the scale of the problem.

AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION

In 2018, Governor Baker signed Automatic Voter Registration into law -- specifying that voters must be given the option to opt-out of registering after their AVR transaction. This is what's known as "back-end" AVR, and it is a more effective system of registering voters. However, the Secretary of the Commonwealth ignored the law and implemented a "front-end" system, where voters have the option of opting out at the point of service (like a transaction at the RMV), which encourages voters to opt-out of registering at higher rates. We must fix that and ensure the law is implemented as it was passed.

ERIC

Electronic Registration Information Center

The Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) will bring Massachusetts voter rolls up-to-date, and make the implementation of all the above reforms easier for election officials. What's more, it was already passed in 2018 - the Secretary of the Commonwealth just needs to implement it.



Key Facts

- Back-end AVR is the gold standard.
 - Our research shows that back-end AVR increases voter registration by at least three percentage points more than front-end AVR.
 - Like Same Day Registration, AVR mostly updates existing voter registrations. But with front-end AVR, people may reflexively "opt-out" at the point of service if they're frustrated or rushed - for instance, after waiting in line at the RMV.
 - Back-end opt-out is more secure than front-end because it places the responsibility confirming voter eligibility on government officials, rather than individuals.
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- ERIC is used in 30 states and Washington, D.C.
 - Nationwide, 1 in every 8 voter registrations is inaccurate.
 - ERIC communicates between states, ensuring that Massachusetts' voter rolls are updated as voters move to and from the Commonwealth.
 - Improving Massachusetts' voter registration system is critical for ensuring that reforms like Same Day Registration work for voters and elections officials alike.



ACLU MA, Action for Equity, ADL New England, American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, American Promise, Amplify Latinx, Arise for Social Justice, Black Boston COVID19 Coalition, Black Economic Justice Institute, Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston, Inc., Boston Ten Point Coalition, Boston Ujima Project, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, Common Cause MA, City Life / Vida Urbana, City Mission, Inc., Coalition for a Better Acre, Coalition for Social Justice, Codman Square NDC, Community Action Works Campaigns, Conservation Law Foundation, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Edgartown Democratic Town Committee, Environmental League of Massachusetts, Equal Citizens, ForwardMA, Franklin County Continuing the Political Revolution, Freedom House, Garrison Trotter Neighborhood Association, Generation Citizen, Greater Boston Nazarene Compassionate Center Inc., Greater Boston Section-National Council of Negro Women, GSM Labor Council, Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc. (IAC), Indivisible Martha's Vineyard, Indivisible Massachusetts Coalition, Indivisible Outer Cape, iVOTE, JCRC, Jetpac Resource Center, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action, La Colaborativa, La Comunidad, Inc., Lawrence Partnership, Lawyers for Civil Rights, Lift Every Vote, League of Women Voters MA, Madison Park Development Corporation, MAPS-Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants, Mass Equality, Mass NOW, Mass. Assoc. of Community Development Corporations, Massachusetts AFL-CIO, Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement, Massachusetts Communities Action Network, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Massachusetts Peace Action, Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition, MASSCreative, MASSPIRG, MASSPIRG Students, MassVOTE, Massachusetts Voter Table, MITvote, NAACP-Boston Branch, Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts, Next Leadership Development Corporation, Nonprofit Vote, Planned Parenthood MA, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts, Progressive Massachusetts, Progressives for Democracy in America, Project R.I.G.H.T., Providers' Council- CareVote, Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts, Quincy Geneva New Vision CDC, Racial Justice Rising, Reclaim Our Democracy, Roca Inc., Rosie's Place, SEIU 1199, Shana Bryant Consulting Services, Small Planet Institute, Sunrise Boston, The Good Governance Project - BC Law, The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, The Real Cost of Prisons Project, The Women's Pipeline for Change, Transformative Culture Project, Union of Minority Neighborhoods, Unitarian Universalist Mass Action, UTEC Inc., VOTE New Bedford, Voter Choice Massachusetts, Worcester Interfaith, Yes - Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance, Young Democrats of Massachusetts, YWCA Malden, and YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts.