

# An Act Reforming Election Laws

SENATE BILL 327—SEN. FINEGOLD

## Problem.

Outdated election administration laws and procedures wrongly disenfranchise eligible voters and led to three hour wait-times at many polling places in cities across the Commonwealth in 2012. Yet **Massachusetts has not implemented proven reforms that would make our elections more secure, accurate, accessible, and efficient.**

Massachusetts is one of only 15 states that do not have early voting or absentee ballots available to all requesters. It is one of 24 states that do not audit election equipment. And Massachusetts continues to lag behind the growing list of 17 states that now offer online voter registration and the 18 that allow youth to pre-register to vote.

**It's time for Massachusetts to lead on the issue of ensuring free, fair, and accessible elections.**

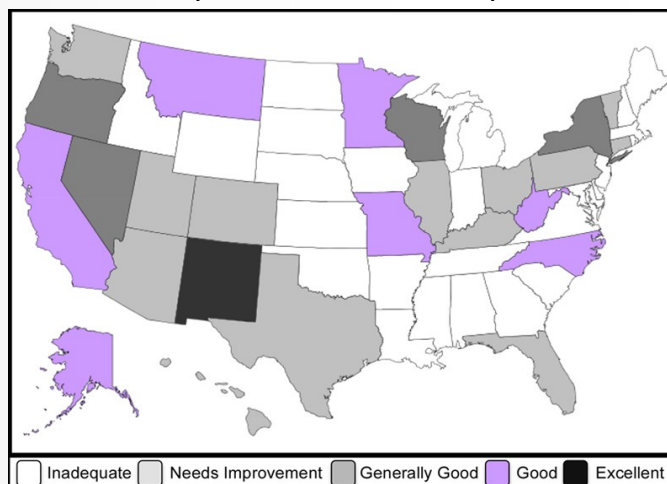
## Solution: Post-election audits of election equipment.

Recent history shows many examples of errors or malfunctions by voting equipment in Massachusetts. Post-election audits would allow election administrators to ensure that voting machines have accurately counted all ballots.

The audit is conducted by comparing reported preliminary machine counts to manual counts of the same ballots in 3% of randomly selected precincts to ensure that they match and that machines are accurately recording the vote. Auditing is a low-cost program that could be primarily funded by funds authorized by the national *Help America Vote Act*.

Post-election audits help ensure accurate election results by identifying system errors and fraud, and instill public confidence in the integrity of our elections. They also provide election officials concrete, historical data allowing them to identify and correct systematic problems in results or procedures.

## States with post-election audit procedures.



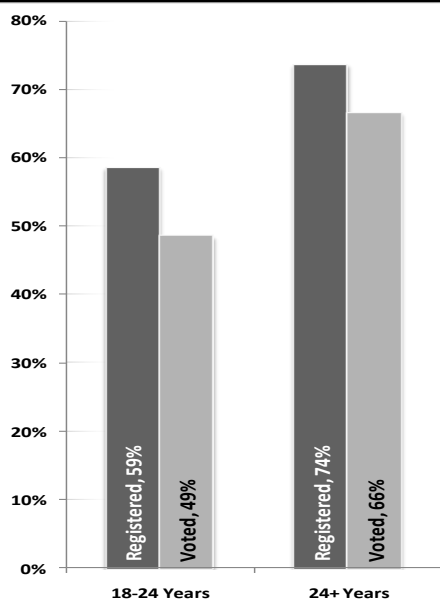
## Solution: Pre-registration for 16 year-olds.

Young people are the least likely demographic to register and vote. In the 2008 election, there was a 15% gap between registered voters between the ages of 18 and 24 and voters older than 24. Allowing 16 and 17 year-olds to pre-register to vote is a legal, workable, inexpensive way to increase voter turnout among this demographic.

Academic studies show that voting behavior is habit-forming. A young voter who starts voting now is more likely to keep voting in the future.

The registration system will automatically transfer 'pending' registrations to 'active' when a voter becomes eligible, a procedure the system is already employs for voters who are not yet 18 at the time of registering, but will be at the time of the next upcoming election.

Lowering the registration age does not lower the voting age.



## Solution: Online voter registration and online registration look-up.

Currently, Massachusetts residents must fill out an application, sign it in paper form, and mail or deliver it to an election officials before being added to the voter rolls. Online registration would allow citizens to fill out paperless applications over the internet, provided they are already listed in the registry of motor vehicles database and their signature is on-file. This will reduce processing time, cuts costs, decreases errors, and encourage more people to register.

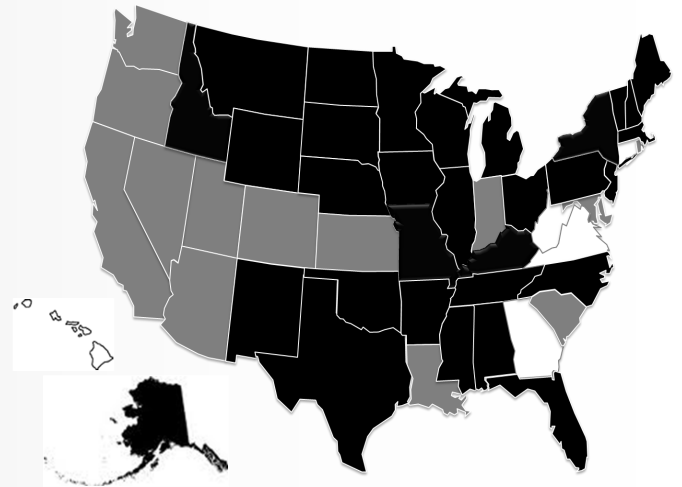
Online voter registration look-up would help voters determine whether and where they are registered in advance of an election. As a result, fewer voters will go to the wrong location, wardens will be less burdened by confused voters and added paperwork, and lines should be decreased.

**It is secure.** The online system would search the Registry of Motor Vehicles database for the applicants driver's license and other identifying information and match it to the electronic form. Newly registered voters would be required to show proof of residence the first time they vote.

**It will increase voter registration.** Registration rates rose by 9.5% in Arizona with online registration.

**It will cut costs.** In Arizona, processing costs went from 83 cents per form to 3 cents.

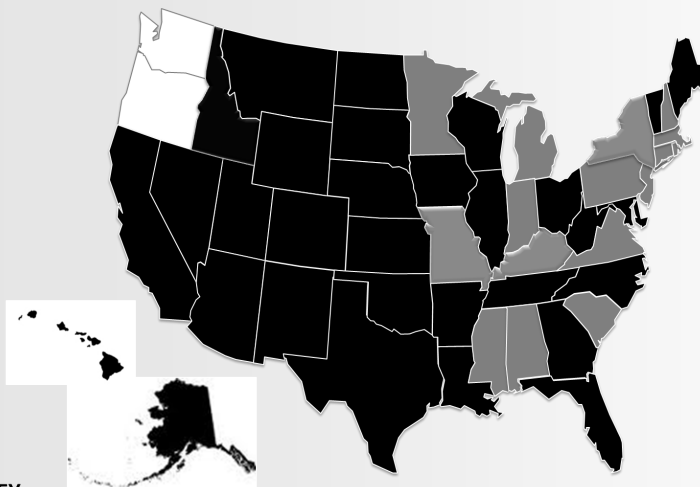
As of early 2013, 17 states have passed online voter registration measure. Massachusetts is one of only nine states that does not allow for online voter registration look-up.



**KEY**  
 ■ No online voter registration   ■ States with online registration  
 □ Online voter registration has passed, not yet implemented

## Solution: Early Voting.

Busy schedules filled with work, child care, and errands make voting on Election Day difficult for many eligible voters. However, current state law does not allow alternative voting options unless the voter is out of town, physically disabled or religiously restricted. Moreover, limited voting options leads to Election Day congestion and long lines at the polls. **Massachusetts should follow the lead of so many other states in increasing voting options to ensure accessible voting for all.**



**KEY**  
 ■ State has early voting   ■ State does not offer early voting  
 □ All mail voting

Early voting allows residents to vote up to two weeks before Election Day. Voters cast ballots in person at supervised locations in the same manner as on official Election Day. In 2012, 32 states and Washington, D.C. utilized early voting.

- It relieves congestion and wait times on Election Day, especially at peak voting hours.
- It is popular among voters. In 2012, 33-40% of voters nationwide voted early when the option was available.
- It improves voter retention and moderately increases voter turnout.
- It prevents some forms of voter disenfranchisement. For instance, if a voter forgets identification, the voter has an opportunity to return with it.