



Testimony in Support of H. 63, H. 568, H. 604, H. 615, H. 636 H. 650, S. 12

Early Voting

Pam Wilmot, Executive Director, Common Cause Massachusetts

Joint Committee on Election Laws

March 27, 2013

The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy, and voting should be as easy and accessible as possible. Early voting allows citizens to cast their ballots at special designated polling before Election Day.

In states that offer early voting, currently 32, the record shows that the convenience has had a modestly positive impact on turnout in non-federal elections (see the reverse for a list of states that allow early voting). It does not turn non-registered voters into voters, as does Election Day registration. What it does do, according to empirical studies, is persuade voters who might miss the odd election to vote more regularly.¹ This retention of voters from election to election increases voter turnout in contests that are not highly publicized.²

Early voting also acts as valve to relieve pressure on Election Day by reducing the numbers of voters who must vote on that day only. While having a large turnout is a good thing, having voters wait in lines up to three hours, as happened in a few places in Boston, and close to that in several other cities, is unacceptable. Evidence suggests that early voting reduces lines on Election Day and can make Election Day procedures more manageable and efficient.³ That is one of the reasons that Mayor Menino has strongly supported early voting bills in the past.⁴ The reform is also quite popular with voters and enjoys widespread support in public opinion polls.

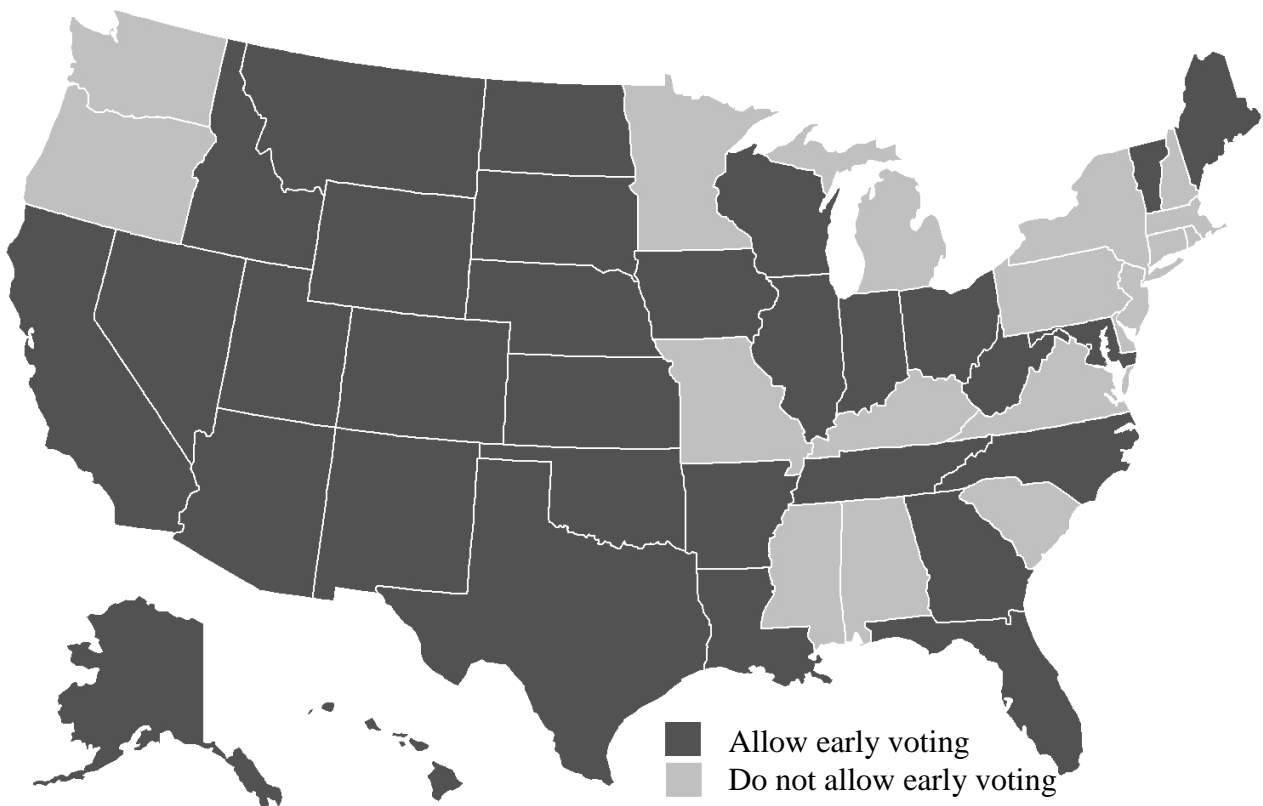
In implementing early voting, we advocate for a longer voting period with weekend and after work hours. With too few early voting sites and too few hours, some states have experienced lines as long as 8 hours at early voting sites. We hope that you will give early voting, either in one or more of these bills, or as part of a larger package, a favorable report.

In addition to the District of Columbia, thirty-two states currently allow some form of early voting:⁵

Alaska
Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana

Iowa
Kansas
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Mexico
North Carolina
North Dakota

Ohio
Oklahoma
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming



¹ Paul Gronke, *Early Voting Reforms and American Elections*, 17 WM. & MARY BILL RTS. J. 432-33 (2008).

² Id.

³ The Early Voting Information Center, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://earlyvoting.net/faq>.

⁴ John C. Drake, *City Council Considers Moving Voting Day to Saturdays*, BOSTON GLOBE, April 3, 2008 (reporting that Mayor Menino believes there is a need for early voting in Massachusetts) available at http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/04/03/city_council_considers_moving_voting_day_to_saturdays/

⁵ National Conference of State Legislatures, *Absentee and Early Voting*, <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=16604>.