

AVR Talking Points

Topline Message:

All eligible Massachusetts residents have the constitutional right to participate in our elections. Nothing should stand in the way of a voter having their voice heard and their vote counted in our democracy. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is a vital step to making sure that all Bay Staters have an equal voice in the political process by allowing voters to automatically register to vote when they interact with key state agencies. It will modernize our voter registration system to make it more accurate, secure, and cost-effective.

Why we need it:

- 680,000 eligible Massachusetts voters are not registered—AVR will help give them a voice in our democracy.
- AVR will help protect the fundamental right of every American to have their vote counted on Election Day.
- AVR will improve the accuracy and security of our voter rolls.
- AVR will eliminate much of the human error that comes with paper forms, more frequently update records when people move, and eliminate duplicate records.
- AVR could save Massachusetts money in the long run.

How it works:

- AVR seamlessly integrates voter registration procedures into RMV, MassHealth, and other social service agencies that already provide voter registration services under the federal Motor Voter Law.
- Once an agency collects the information required to register to vote, this information is electronically transferred to the central voter database and local registrars without additional forms or paperwork.
- Local registrars then add those that are eligible to vote and not already registered to their official voting rolls.
- Voters can choose a political party or decline to be registered for any reason.
- Massachusetts would also join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a national clearinghouse that collects registration information and compares it with that of other states and other state and federal databases to assure accuracy and security of voting lists.
- The AVR legislation under consideration imposes a criminal penalty of up to a \$10,000 fine and/or 5 years' imprisonment for anyone who knowingly provides false registration information.

Success in other states:

- AVR has passed in 10 other states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Oregon, Vermont, West Virginia, Rhode Island, and Illinois), plus Washington, D.C.
- 32 additional states are currently considering AVR legislation.

- After passing AVR in Oregon, over 230,000 new voters were added to the state's rolls in just six months.
- More than 97,000 of these new Oregon voters participated in the 2016 election.
- AVR updated 265,000 inaccurate Oregon addresses.
- Partly due to AVR, Oregon had a 4.1 percent increase in voter turnout, one of the largest increases between 2012 and 2016 among eligible voters.
- AVR increased voter registration among Oregon's most mobile populations and in some of its poorest communities.

The AVR bill's status in the State House:

- There are two Automatic Voter Registration bills that we are supporting: **S. 373 and H. 2091**. They are sponsored by Senator Cynthia Creem and Representative Peter Kocot, plus 22 other Senators and 80 Representatives.
- The bills were recently heard by the Joint Committee on Election Laws. Last session, the Committee favorably reported out a similar bill.
- The MA Town Clerks Association testified that they were "fine" with the bill if there was sufficient funding for implementation.
- Implementation costs can be easily and fully covered by the State's Federal Help America Vote account.

Countering opposition:

- Voter Registration is not that hard. People should have to make an effort to register.
 - American democracy should work for us all, not give some people voice and power while shutting out others. For many (especially low-income people, people of color, young people, and people working multiple jobs), it's unnecessarily burdensome to keep voter registration up-to-date and navigate the voter registration bureaucracy. Automatic voter registration is a vital step to making sure that all Americans have an equal voice in the political process by allowing voters to automatically register to vote when they interact with a state agency.
- Won't this reform register non-citizens?
 - No. Voters must already indicate citizenship when they register to vote, and only those that do so will be registered to vote with automatic voter registration. There is a fail-safe in the bill to hold harmless anyone who is registered inappropriately as well as tough penalties for those that knowingly misrepresent their citizenship status.
- Automatic Voter Registration will infringe on people's privacy.
 - AVR does not make voter registration any less private than it already is; it simply registers more people. The decision to decline registration is not public.
- Automatic Voter Registration will increase fraud.
 - Because automatic voter registration happens in state offices and involves eligible voters showing documentation, it actually increases security and decreases errors, especially over processes conducted by third parties. In addition, the legislation requires Massachusetts to join ERIC to further eliminate duplicate or other inaccurate registrations.