



The Facts on Early Voting

Basics.

In May 2014, the Massachusetts legislature passed an historic reform of our state’s election laws. As part of the new law, they established early voting starting with the November 2016 election.

Our early voting period will start 11 business days preceding the November election. Within that period, municipalities are required to have at least one voting site open during normal business hours. Evening and weekend hours and additional voting sites may be added at a community’s discretion.

Benefits.

- Relieves congestion on Election Day—especially during typical peak times before and after normal work hours.
- Allows voters the flexibility to fit voting into busy schedules filled with work, child care, and errands.
- The increased accessibility of elections improves voter retention.
- Allows voters who might miss an odd election to vote more regularly.
- Impedes many forms of voter disenfranchisement. For instance, if a voter is turned away for not having identification, the voter will have an opportunity to return with it.
- Modestly boosts turnout in disenfranchised communities.

Myths.

Length—Massachusetts will only allow early voting 11 business days prior to Election Day, a short window that allows for informed opinions in selecting a candidate. People who vote early tend to be highly committed voters, with strong preferences that are not swayed by late developments.

Fraud—There is no evidence of any increased risk of fraud. Voters will cast ballots primarily in person at supervised locations using the same mechanisms as absentee ballots, which includes signing an application.

Turnout—Many studies have shown either a positive effect on turnout, especially in disenfranchised communities, or a neutral one. One study showed a small negative impact. Yet even the author of the study recognized a flaw in data collection that lumped together mail-in absentee voting and in-person early voting.

