



Massachusetts

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80+ Massachusetts Organizations Urge Adoption of Election Bill Amendments Ahead of Tuesday Vote

Ahead of Tuesday's Senate vote, the Election Modernization Coalition and 80 Massachusetts organizations sent a letter to the Senate in support of S. 2755 and three amendments to strengthen protections for voters and elections administrators.

The groups praised the bill as "critical and significant," but said that the bill requires three "crucial amendments." These amendments, numbers 3, 8, and 33, would:

- ensure that the Secretary of the Commonwealth creates an effective online portal for requesting ballots,
- ensure that all ballots sent on or before election day in November are counted, and
- expand the deadline for requesting absentee ballots.

Forty-one amendments have been filed by state Senators in advance of Tuesday's vote.

"The legislation that the Senate will be considering is very close to what the House passed last week," said **Common Cause Massachusetts Executive Director Pam Wilmot**. "It is very strong and will go a long way towards making sure that every voter can safely cast a ballot in our fall elections. But we urge the Senate to adopt three amendments. With those changes, this bill will ensure that Bay Staters - who may otherwise have been prevented from casting a ballot by the coronavirus pandemic - can exercise their fundamental right to participate in our democracy."

"From the importance of this November's election and the true threats that COVID-19 presents to it, the stakes for our elections have never been higher. But add to that the renewed urgency that the past weeks' protests bring to the fight to hold government accountable - it has never been more important that every eligible voter can make their voice heard. With these amendments, S. 2755 will do just that," Wilmot said.

Full sign-on letter below.

June 11, 2020

Dear President Spilka and members of the Senate,

Last week the House passed a strong elections bill, H. 4778, to help protect voters and election workers from the coronavirus this fall. The legislation will help every voter who wants to cast a ballot from the safety of their own home to do so and will help ensure that our election system is prepared for a tsunami of mail ballots. With its swift action, the House recognized the need to move quickly to help keep voters safe and to adapt our election procedures accordingly.

The bill requires the Secretary of State to mail ballot applications to all voters for the first time. This change, along with the establishment of an online portal for requesting ballots, expanding early voting, and other reforms in the legislation, is critical and significant.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee bill, S. 2755, only made a few small changes. However, one change is problematic and the Committee did not fix two issues we had identified with the House Bill. Accordingly, we have filed three amendments that we believe are crucial, and we think will be acceptable to the House. We are reviewing other amendments and may support others, but have identified the following as our collective priorities:

- Amendment #33, Senator Comerford: Expanded deadline for requesting a ballot. The Senate bill expands the blackout period when voters can no longer request a mail ballot. While we recognize that the current deadline of only a few hours before the election is too short, the seven days proposed by the Senate Ways and Means bill is too long and puts us behind 22 other states that are more generous to voters. The House bill language strikes the right balance for the 2020 elections by requiring the receipt of ballot requests by noon of the Friday before the elections, although it inexplicably created a different deadline for 2021 and beyond. This amendment would keep the Friday deadline for elections in 2020 and going forward and thereby allow more people to cast a mail ballot.
- Amendment #8, Senator Hinds: Postmarked Ballots. Our second amendment addresses a deficit in the House and now the Senate bill regarding ballots received after Election Day. Massachusetts must ensure that ballots mailed by Election Day in November are counted, even if they arrive a few days after the polls close. Given the expected dramatic increase in the volume of mail-in ballots and a postal service that is not performing at peak capacity, extending the deadline is critical to help ensure that tens of thousands of voters are not disenfranchised. Seventeen other states, including California, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas, already follow this rule to make sure that every vote counts in all of their elections. Many other states will adopt temporary orders to do the same. For our primary election, mailed ballots will still have to be received by Election Day because of a tight deadline for printing the November election ballot. But this is an important reform for November. The

problem this amendment addresses is the postmark requirement in both the House and Senate bills. Many pieces of mail, including all metered mail, do not get postmarked, so by requiring a postmark, the current bill will cause tens of thousands of ballots properly mailed and received by the deadline to remain uncounted. The amendment allows evidence other than postmarks to prove the date of mailing, which other states have been doing for many years. This amendment will help ensure that ballots with missing or illegible postmarks are not disregarded.

- Amendment #3, Senator Lesser: Online Portal. Our third amendment strengthens the bill's language establishing an online portal so that Massachusetts voters have a safe and easy means of requesting a mail ballot. The portal will also ensure that our local election officials have less work processing paper applications. We remain very concerned about the clerks' workload in the fall. Processing a ten- to twenty-fold increase in mail ballot applications and then processing the returned ballots has crushed election officials in other states this spring, even in relatively low-turnout elections. Massachusetts already has similar online portals including the current online voter registration system. The amendment will create an affirmative duty to create the mail-in ballot request portal and will clarify that a signature is not required to access it. Massachusetts' other portals, such as online voter registration, use personal identifying information. Requiring a signature would be difficult if not impossible to implement. Many other states including Maine, Vermont, and New York have portals. Idaho developed one in three weeks. They do not require signatures.

Please join us in supporting these amendments to the bill so that the Commonwealth can conduct fair and accessible elections this fall without risking public health. The clock is ticking, and every week we delay is one lost for election officials to implement these important reforms.

Sincerely,

Pam Wilmot, Common Cause Massachusetts
Rahsaan Hall, the ACLU of Massachusetts
Janet Domenitz, MASSPIRG
Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, MassVOTE
Patricia Comfort, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
Beth Huang, Massachusetts Voter Table
Sophia Hall, Lawyers for Civil Rights
Chrissy Lynch, AFL-CIO
Marvin Martin, Action for Equity
Beth Kontos, American Federation of Teachers-MA
Jeff Clements, American Promise
Tanisha Arena, Arise for Social Justice

Priscilla Flint-Banks, Black Boston COVID19 Coalition
Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, Black Directors' Network
Larry Banks, Black Economic Justice Institute
Rev. David Wright, Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston, Inc.
Spencer Brown and Eve Seitchik, Boston Democratic Socialists of America
Rev. David Wright, Boston Ten Point Coalition
Nia Evans, Boston Ujima Project
Phyllis Neufeld, Burlington Democratic Town Committee
David J. Harris, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice
Gladys Vega, Chelsea Collaborative
Lisa Owens, City Life Vida Urbana
Rev. June Cooper, City Mission, Inc.
Deb Fastino, Coalition for Social Justice
Gail Latimore, Codman Square NDC
Alan Epstein, Criminal Justice Reform Task Force of Congregation Dorshei
Tzedek
Madeline Hertz, Democratic Policy Center
Elizabeth Henry, Environmental League of Massachusetts
Adam Eichen, Equal Citizens
Katrinia Shaw, Freedom House
Samuel M. Gebru, Generation Citizen Massachusetts
Beverly Williams and Rev. Burns Stanfield, The Greater Boston Interfaith
Organization
Charlene Greene, Greater Boston Section-National Council of Negro
Women
Carla Cooper, Indivisible Martha's Vineyard
Debbie Paul, Indivisible Mass Coalition
Laurie Veninger, Indivisible Outer Cape
Nadeem Mazen, Jetpac
Cindy Rowe, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Aaron Agulnek, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston
Joyce Hackett, Lift+Every+Vote
David A. Bryant, MA Association of Community Development Corporations
Javier Gutierrez, Madison Park Development Corporation
Michael Kane, Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants
Janine Carreiro, Mass Communities Action Network
Thomas Callahan, Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance
Cassandra Bensahih, Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement
Georgia Katsoulomitis, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Eva A. Millona, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Andrea Burns, Massachusetts Peace Action

Celia J. Blue, Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition
Emily Ruddock, MASSCreative
Phillip Kassel, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
MITvote Executive Board, MITvote
Sue Swanson, Mothers Out Front
Juan M. Cofield, NAACP- New England Area Conference
Tanisha Sullivan, NAACP-Boston Branch
Rebekah Gewirtz, National Association of Social Workers, MA Chapter
Maria Elena Letona, Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts
Brian Miller, Nonprofit Vote
Zac Bears, PHENOM
Mehreen Butt, Planned Parenthood
John Lippitt, Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Russell Freedman, Progressive For Democracy in America
Fred Van Deusen, Reclaim Our Democracy
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Deb Pasternak, Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
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Mark Haidar, The Equal Democracy Project at Harvard Law School
Shahara Jaghoo, The Women's Pipeline for Change
Claire Miller, Toxics Action Center
Aziza Robinson-Goodnight, Transformative Culture Project
Horace Small, Union of Minority Neighborhoods
Laura Wagner MSW, Unitarian Universalist Mass Action
George Pillsbury, Voter Choice for Massachusetts 2020
Isabel Gonzalez-Webster, Worcester Interfaith
Lezlie Braxton Campbell, Young Democrats of Massachusetts
YWCA Malden
Jordan Latham, YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts
Whitney Mooney, YWCA Cambridge

The Election Modernization Coalition is comprised of the ACLU of Massachusetts, Common Cause Massachusetts, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, Lawyers for Civil Rights, MASSPIRG, MassVOTE, and the Massachusetts Voter Table. The Coalition's longstanding goals include ensuring elections are accessible, participatory, accurate, and safe.