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New Legislation Will Increase Voter Participation Advocates Urge Swift Passage

BOSTON - Senator Cindy Creem and Representative John Lawn have filed legislation that the Election Modernization Coalition heralded as the most comprehensive next step for Massachusetts elections.

The legislation, “An Act Fostering Voting Opportunities, Trust, Equity, and Security,” or “the VOTES Act” would make permanent many of the short-term reforms implemented for elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, including **allowing all eligible voters to request a mail ballot** and **expanding early voting options**. The VOTES Act also: establishes **same-day voter registration**; ensures that **eligible voters who are incarcerated** are able to request a mail ballot and vote; and creates a **risk-limiting audit** system to replace Massachusetts’ dated method of post-election audits. Risk-limiting audits are considered “[the gold standard](#)” and have already been implemented in [Colorado](#), [Georgia](#), and [Rhode Island](#). The legislation would also require the Secretary of Commonwealth to implement **Automatic Voter Registration** as passed by the Legislature in 2018, to better streamline voter registration

The Election Modernization Coalition is comprised of longtime advocates who championed early voting, online voter registration, Automatic Voter Registration, and the legislation passed in the summer of 2020 to respond to the COVID pandemic. According to the Coalition, the Creem-Lawn Bill comes at a critical moment. After months of misinformation and disinformation about the nation’s elections, outright attacks on US democracy, and a movement for racial justice that once again highlighted existing racism and racial inequity in the nation, this legislation offers concrete solutions that are badly-needed in the Commonwealth.

“We learned in 2020 that when you reduce barriers to voter participation, more voters participate, and our democracy becomes even stronger,” says **Janet Domenitz of MASSPIRG**. “The VOTES Act builds on the success of our fall elections, in which we had record turnouts, and targets all kinds of barriers to registration and voting that still stand in Massachusetts.”

“As a coalition, we have been fighting for same day voter registration for years,” says **Geoff Foster, Executive Director of Common Cause Massachusetts**. “It’s been used in nearly half of states, for decades, and MA is ready for this system. Giving voters the option to update their registration on

election day, or register to vote, is integral for removing one of the most daunting barriers to political participation”

“The 2020 elections made two facts clear about democracy in Massachusetts,” said **Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, the Executive Director of MassVOTE**. “First, the elections revealed that major reforms like vote by mail were both immensely popular and successful. Second, they proved that our democracy is not working for our Black and brown, immigrant, and low-income voters. We are supporting the MA VOTES Act because it not only builds off of the successes of 2020, but takes steps necessary to bridging the inequities crippling our democracy.”

"Massachusetts saw an exponential increase in voter participation last fall, making clear that expanded access to the ballot makes our democracy stronger. This bill will ensure increased access to the democratic process for the communities who need it most, particularly Black and Latinx voters. At a time when some states are doubling down on measures to suppress the vote, Beacon Hill must continue to go further in the upcoming legislative session to make voting accessible to all eligible voters." said **Rahsaan Hall of the ACLU of Massachusetts**.

"At a time when too many states are trying to restrict voting access, this bill continues Massachusetts' efforts to expand the ways people in the state can vote. We look forward to Massachusetts continuing to set a national example with expanded mail voting and other reforms," said **Patricia Comfort, executive director, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts**.

"This forward looking legislation that expands on the progress that we have already made in this difficult time is what the most vulnerable in Massachusetts need and what this Commonwealth deserves," said **Sophia Hall, Supervising Attorney of Lawyers for Civil Rights Boston**. "We can no longer look back to the hurdles that we asked voters to overcome. In a time when so many communities of color are actively advocating to expand access to the ballot box, Massachusetts needs to be a leader in election modernization and set a blueprint for other states to follow."

“Bay Staters incarcerated on misdemeanors, or detained pretrial, have always had the right to vote in Massachusetts. But our Commonwealth has never ensured that right in practice. This bill ensures mail ballot applications are provided to every eligible incarcerated voter, which is long overdue to ensure that disproportionate incarceration and policing of Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities does not automatically lead to hyper-disenfranchisement,” said **Beth Huang, the Director of the Massachusetts Voter Table**.