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Dozens of Organizations Testify in Support of Automatic Voter Registration

Leaders and advocates voice support for modernizing elections in Massachusetts

BOSTON, MA -- Advocates for modernizing Massachusetts' elections showed up in force for a hearing on Beacon Hill today, held by the Joint Committee on Election Laws. The hearing was in support of the Automatic Voter Registration bill, which would establish a system for eligible citizens in Massachusetts to automatically register to vote when they interact with a state agency like the registry of motor vehicles. The legislation, introduced by Sen. Cynthia Creem and Rep. Peter Kocot, has popular support in both houses; with 80 House co-sponsors and 22 Senate sponsors as of hearing time.

More than twenty leaders from the labor movement, universities, environmental groups, political organizations, civil rights and good government advocacy organizations testified on behalf of the legislation, while dozens of supporters looked on. Many spoke of how automatic voter registration ensures that all eligible citizens in Massachusetts have the opportunity to participate in elections.

"By passing automatic voter registration, Massachusetts can lead the way towards giving all citizens a voice in their government," said Pam Wilmot, Executive Director of Common Cause Massachusetts. "The system would give the nearly 700,000 eligible citizens that are not registered to vote an opportunity to have their voices heard through our election process. At the same time, Automatic Voter Registration would update and modernize our election system by increasing the accuracy, security, and efficiency of the process."

Eight states and the District of Columbia have already passed automatic voter registration, all in a bipartisan manner: Oregon, California, West Virginia, Alaska, Vermont, Colorado, Georgia,

and Connecticut. In Oregon, the first state to implement Automatic Voter Registration, 230,000 voters registered in its first six months and more than 500,000 inaccurate registrations were updated. About 100,000 (97,000) voters participated in the 2016 election because of the reform.

Representatives from several other leading citizen organizations testified for the bill, including Nancy Brumback, Legislative Action Chair of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts. “The League strongly supports automatic voter registration as the next logical step in the modernization of the electoral process here in Massachusetts,” she said. “AVR will improve the accuracy of voter rolls, create a more efficient and reliable voting system, help control the costs of voter registration over time, and improve the voting process on Election Day.”

Cheryl Clyburn Crawford of MassVOTE said, “Automatic voter registration is a step in the right direction to removing one of the barriers that disproportionately affects our most disenfranchised communities. It is our strong belief that automatic voter registration in Massachusetts will increase voter participation and turnout while continuing to modernize our electoral process.”

“...Our Commonwealth must set an example on voting rights for the nation to follow,” said Congressman Joe Kennedy in written testimony submitted to the Committee. “We need to prove how strong a system can be when it is inclusive, progressive and fair. The rollout of early voting in 2016 was an enormous success, with over one million residents casting early ballots. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) must come next.”

“This is a bipartisan, common sense, 21st century bill which will make voter registration more accessible, more secure and less costly in the Commonwealth,” said Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MASSPIRG. “We have Republican and Democrat supporters in the Legislature here, the Republican Governor of Illinois indicated that he would sign similar bill into law that passed the legislature unanimously a few weeks ago, and in a time of hyper-partisanship in this country we’re inspired to call for this bill’s passage.”

Advocacy organizations behind the effort, including Common Cause Massachusetts, MassVOTE, the Massachusetts Voter Table, Progressive Massachusetts, MASSPIRG, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice have worked together for many years to promote voting access and reform. They see automatic voter registration as a continuation of earlier efforts in the state, like early voting, to improve access to the ballot. Early voting was a resounding success; In its first debut, over one million voters cast their ballots early in October 2016, accounting for over 22% of registered voters and 35% of those that voted.

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Full list of endorsing organizations (alphabetical order):

Action Together Western Mass
AFSC - Cambridge

Berkshire Democratic Brigades
Berkshire Women's Action Group

Black Directors Network
Boston Democratic Ward 4 Committee
Boston Teachers Union
Cambridge Democratic City Cmmtt
Clean Water Action
College Democrats of MA
Common Cause Massachusetts
Democracy for America
Democracy Matters
Environmental League of MA Action Fund
ForwardMA
Garrison Trotter Neighborhood Association
Green Tea Party
Indivisible (Many chapters)
Jewish Association for Law and Social
Action (JALSA)
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and
Economic Justice
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
Lift Every Vote
Mass Affordable Housing Alliance
Mass Law Reform Institute

Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
Union of Minority Neighborhoods

Massachusetts Peace Action
Massachusetts Teachers Association
Massachusetts Voter Table
MASSPIRG
MassVOTE
NAACP Boston
National Association of Social Workers,
Massachusetts Chapter
Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts
Education Fund
New England United for Justice
Our Revolution Cambridge
PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network
of Massachusetts)
Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts
Progressive Democrats of America, Boston
chapter
Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Progressive Massachusetts
SEIU Local 509
SEIU Massachusetts State Council
Sierra Club
Small Planet Institute