



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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House approves bill offering expanded voting options for 2020 state and municipal elections

BOSTON –The House of Representatives has approved legislation that would allow Massachusetts voters to safely participate in upcoming state and local elections using expanded early voting and mail-in voting options.

House Bill 4768, *An Act relative to voting options in response to COVID-19*, was engrossed by the House on a vote of 155-1 on June 4, and will now move to the Senate for further action.

State Representative Todd Smola (R-Warren) said House Bill 4768 takes several steps to help minimize the public health risks for voters and poll workers participating in this year's elections. It requires the Secretary of State to mail applications to all registered voters by July 15, and again by September 14, so those who wish to do so can request a vote-by-mail ballot for the September 1 primary and the November 3 general election, respectively. Voters must submit a ballot request to their city or town clerk by August 28 for the primary and by October 30 for the general election, using a pre-paid envelope provided with the application.

House Bill 4768 provides the same application filing cut-off dates for absentee ballot requests, but sets a deadline of noon on the day immediately preceding the election for individuals wishing to cast an absentee ballot in person. Applications, as well as ballots, must be provided in any language required by the bilingual election requirements of the federal Voting Rights Act.

To avoid overcrowding at polling locations on election day, completed early voting ballots can be mailed using a pre-paid return postage envelope, delivered in-person to the local clerk's office, or placed in a secured municipal drop-box, if one is available. Cities and towns will be required to provide early voting hours, including weekend hours, for individuals casting ballots

in-person for the primary election from August 22-28, and from October 17-October 30 for the general election.

Representative Smola noted that House Bill 4768 gives qualified voters the option to vote early by mail for any city or town election held on or before December 31, 2020. The bill also authorizes electronic voting signatures to be used for early voting and absentee ballot applications for all elections held between now and December 31.

To further minimize the public health risks associated with the novel coronavirus and reduce the number of poll workers needed, House Bill 4768 allows municipalities to eliminate the “check-out” table at polling stations for voters casting ballots in-person on election day.

Several additional amendments were added to the bill during floor debate, including language:

- allowing municipal clerks to process early ballots as they are received by mail, provided they are kept secured, locked, and unexamined, and no results are announced until after the polls close;
- allowing vote-by-mail participants to request certain accommodations from the Secretary of State’s office, including authorized blank electronic ballots that can be filled out electronically and printed for mailing;
- requiring the Secretary of State to provide regulations by July 15 for electronic poll books to be used for the 2020 state elections and all future elections;
- allowing ballot applications to be sent to a mailing address if the address is different than the voter’s residential address;
- requiring any vote to move a polling place for the primary or general election be taken at least 15 days prior to the election, and requiring the local governing body to evaluate whether this change would adversely impact voter access based on race, national origin, disability, income or age, with a report made publically available on the municipal website and in the clerk’s office no later than 3 days prior to changing a polling place;
- establishing the cut-off date for individuals registering to vote for any election taking place on or before December 31, 2020 as 10 days prior to the election; and
- allowing mail-in ballots for the November 3 general election received by 5 p.m. on Friday, November 6 to be counted if they are postmarked on or before election day.

For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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