



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

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Environment and Natural Resources  
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Elder Affairs

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Representative Daniel J. Ryan, Chair  
Joint Committee on Election Laws  
State House, Room 443  
Boston, MA 02133

Senator John F. Keenan, Chair  
Joint Committee on Election Laws  
State House, Room 413-F  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Ryan and Chair Keenan,

I write to you in strong support of my sponsored legislation H.688, *An Act establishing same day registration of voters* and S.410, *An Act making voting administrative changes to create equitable systemic solutions* (ACCESS Act) filed by Senator Cynthia Creem, which includes language from H.688. Same day voter registration (SDVR) would allow eligible individuals to register to vote before they cast a ballot during early voting, or on election day, after they sign an affidavit and provide identification.

I strongly believe that, when it does not compromise election security, we ought to make the ballot box as accessible as possible to the residents of the Commonwealth. I was delighted to vote for the VOTES Act last session, which included important reforms such as permanent mail-in voting, expanded early voting, and measures that made voting for incarcerated individuals easier. Our legislature's action last session served to safeguard our democracy as well as a repudiation of the efforts of those in other states (and some in our Commonwealth as well) who embraced the "Big Lie" after the 2020 election and sought to make voting very difficult in order to suppress minority voters.

SDVR is another step in the right direction towards a Commonwealth in which the ballot box is fully accessible and equitable to all. Not everyone in our Commonwealth has the privilege of understanding or remembering the current registration rules. A recently married couple moving to a new home might not know to update their registration information until it's too late. A young student at UMass might not know they can vote in the Commonwealth until they see a campus flier a week before the election. A new citizen who speaks English as their second language might not have known to register until they turn up at a polling place. These are just some of the times when same day voter registration will make a difference.

Twenty-one (21) states and Washington DC have already implemented SDVR. Some, including Maine and Minnesota have run elections with SDVR for over 40 years. Data from these states has demonstrated that the policy increases the percentage of the electorate that is registered. In addition, data from elections show that most voters who take advantage of SDVR in other states are already registered voters. Individuals go to the polls intending to vote, only to discover that an error on the voter roll means they must cast a provisional ballot. Of the 4,323 provisional ballots issued in the 2020 statewide election in Massachusetts, 2,587 ballots were rejected. A typo in a name, or an old address can stop a citizen from exercising their right to vote. Between new registrations and the benefit to already registered voters, SDVR is estimated to raise turnout by an average of 4% to 12%, depending on the election year.

Voting registration barriers have a disparate racial impact on underrepresented demographic groups in Massachusetts. According to a study by researchers at UMass Amherst and Demos, states with SDVR increased turnout most in Black and Latinx communities. Voter registration came about during the Jim Crow era, in which registration rules, even in the more racially progressive northern states were designed to disenfranchise black voters. This is important to consider given that data shows mail in voting has primarily been utilized by suburban voters, who are more likely to be wealthier and white.

It is no surprise that SDVR is exceedingly popular with our constituents. A November 2021 poll conducted by the UMass Amherst found that 65 percent of Massachusetts residents support same-day registration. According to that poll, more Massachusetts voters supported this measure than supported permanent mail-in voting when we passed the VOTES Act. That's because same day voter registration is not a radical reform – it has already been implemented in close to half the country, including red-leaning states such as Wyoming and Montana. Our Secretary of State, who has competently managed the Commonwealth's elections for many years, endorsed this measure back in 2018. In fact, SDVR was included in federal voting rights legislation that had near unanimous support from Democrats in Congress, but unfortunately could not overcome a filibuster by Senate Republicans at the time.

Thank you for consideration of this written testimony and my request that the committee report this legislation favorably.

Sincerely,



Carmine L. Gentile  
State Representative  
13<sup>th</sup> Middlesex District