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The Honorable Barry R. Finegold
State House, Room 511-A
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Daniel J. Ryan
State House, Room 443
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Updating and Reforming our Election Laws

Dear Chairman Finegold and Chairman Ryan:

I am writing to express my strong support for important reforms to our state's election laws that are currently pending before the Joint Committee on Election Laws. Across the country, we are seeing bills advance in state legislatures that threaten the freedom to vote and would bring our country back to historic levels of disenfranchisement. Here in Massachusetts, we must take the steps necessary to protect the freedom to vote and to ensure that our elections continue to be accessible and secure.

Last year, we saw record-breaking voter participation in the midst of a global pandemic-- thanks to the tireless work of state and local election officials and volunteers, and the perseverance of American voters. In my office, we launched a voter protection initiative, which included an Election Protection Task Force and a voter education campaign with a website and multilingual resources available for voters. We staffed up our Civil Rights Hotline to handle voter intimidation complaints and coordinated with state attorneys general across the country. I appreciate all the hard work of the Legislature, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and community groups to make and implement critical emergency reforms to ensure voters could safely and securely cast their ballots during the public health crisis.

Now we have an opportunity to take what worked in the 2020 election cycle and expand on it to remove barriers to voter participation and make our elections more accessible to all. Pending before the committee are a number of bills that propose important reforms, and I write to highlight my support for several concepts in particular.

Making Early Mail-In Voting Permanent

Early mail-in voting has proven enormously popular among Massachusetts voters. More than 1.5 million Massachusetts voters voted by mail in the November 2020 election, with another 844,000 early voting in person. Together these numbers represent close to 65 percent of all votes cast in the November election. Early mail-in voting has expanded access to the ballot and increased voter participation. It should be made a permanent option for Massachusetts voters.

Same-Day Voter Registration

We must work to reduce barriers to participation in our elections and ensure that the ballot is fully accessible to all eligible voters on the day they go to cast their ballot.

Without same-day voter registration, too many Massachusetts residents—disproportionately people of color, low-income residents, renters, military service members, and young people—are prevented from participating in the process.

Currently, tens of thousands of voters are prohibited from fixing even minor problems with their registration when they go to vote, which leads to thousands of provisional ballots that are cumbersome and expensive for election officials, and often never get counted.

Same-day voter registration will increase participation among people who would not otherwise be able to vote, and I encourage the Committee to support it.

Expanding In-Person Early Voting

While mail-in early voting is a critical option, many Massachusetts voters prefer to exercise their right to vote in-person but benefit from the increased flexibility that early voting in person provides as to when they vote. To that end, I encourage the Committee to expand opportunities to vote early in-person: to expand to 14 from 12 days for general elections, to create a new seven-day period for primary elections, to provide opportunities for voting on the weekend for both primary and general statewide elections, and to allow municipalities to offer early voting for their municipal elections.

Expanding Disability and Language Access

I am committed to working with members of the Legislature and community stakeholders to protect voting rights regardless of a voter's ability status or primary language to ensure that all Massachusetts voters have access to voting options, including vote by mail and in-person voting. Changes to the law should provide for disability-based accommodations to vote early by mail using an accessible electronic ballot.

Jail-Based Voting

I am likewise committed to working with my partners in the Legislature, voting rights advocates, prisoners' advocates, and corrections stakeholders to ensure meaningful access to the ballot for those eligible to vote in our jails and county correctional facilities. The law should build upon existing efforts undertaken by sheriff's departments, my office, the Secretary, and community groups to make clear that eligible voters in our county jails and houses of correction are informed about election dates, deadlines, and their voting rights, have access to ballots, and have access to assistance to complete forms and to ensure ballots are returned and arrive in time to be counted.

* * *

I welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee, the Secretary, our colleagues in elections administration, voting rights advocates, the disability community, prisoners' advocates, and other interested stakeholders to make and implement smart reforms that will protect voting rights and ensure that our elections are accessible to all eligible voters. Thank you for considering these comments.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Anne Johnson Landry, Assistant Attorney General and Senior Policy Advisor, at (617) 963-2027.

Very truly yours,



Maura Healey