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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

AUDITOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH

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May 19, 2021

Representative Daniel J. Ryan, House Chair
Joint Committee on Election Laws
24 Beacon Street
Room 36
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Barry R. Finegold, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Election Laws
24 Beacon Street
Room 511-A
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Ryan and Finegold:

As the Joint Committee on Election Laws examines legislation related to the accessibility and funding of elections, I want to thank you for your commitment to expanding access to the franchise, which is fundamental to our democracy.

I write in support of *An Act relative to early voting cost reimbursements (H. 838/S. 489)*, filed by Representative Steve Ultrino and Senator Rebecca Rausch, respectively. These bills, which assume the permanent extension of early voting, authorize and direct the Office of the State Auditor to collect and certify financial data from municipal elections officials relative to the costs incurred in its administration. It also creates a permanent mechanism for forward funding of those costs through an annual appropriation through the Secretary of State's office. In so doing, it fulfills the Commonwealth's obligation to cover the mandated costs of early voting and relieves municipalities of the uncertainty of future funding.

In recent months my office's Division of Local Mandates has worked closely with all 351 municipalities and the State Secretary's Elections Division to ascertain the amounts spent on early voting in 2020. We expect to certify eligible costs of close to \$3,000,000, which is nearly the amount appropriated by the Legislature for this purpose. I caution, however, against reliance upon this figure for future

appropriations, since funding for the 2020 elections came also from the federal CARES Act, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and the Center for Tech and Civic Life. If not for these external financial resources, which probably will not exist for future elections, the final cost certification for early voting would have been significantly higher and would have far exceeded the legislative appropriation.

We look forward to future discussions with you relative to the categories of spending, amounts spent, and funding sources identified in the data we have collected in order to determine appropriate levels of future funding, as well as ways in which this bill may need to be amended to reflect any further expansions of voting access which involve mandated costs to local clerks.

Taken together, the provisions outlined in the legislation that is before you today only stand to strengthen our democracy and expedite the process for municipalities to receive their mandated share of funding for election costs. I thank you for your time and attention to this important matter, and for your diligence in the pursuit of expanded voting access and funding reimbursements. As always, my office is happy to serve as resource as you undergo this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. M. Bump", written in a cursive style.

Suzanne M. Bump
Auditor of the Commonwealth