



## FY2018 BLA Surveys Yield Positive Responses

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March 15th, 2018

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### Important Dates & Information

#### Need a new ID or driver's license? New documents required.

On March 26, 2018, to get or renew any driver's license, ID card, or learner's permit, customers will need documentation showing U.S. citizenship or lawful presence as required by federal and state law. At that time, customers will also need to choose between getting a REAL ID

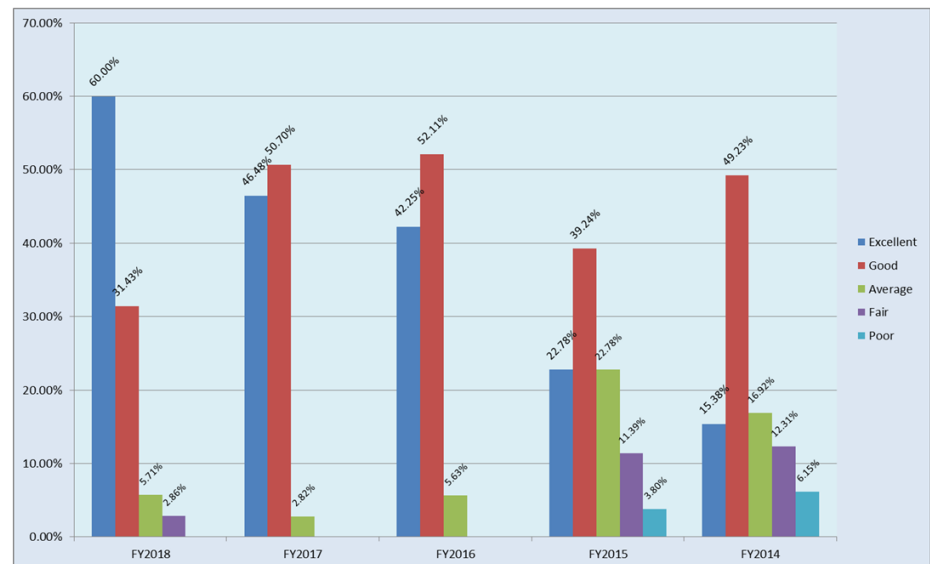
For the fifth consecutive year, the Bureau of Local Assessment (BLA) has asked local assessors to rate their overall experience with our certification and interim year review processes. Assessors in each of the 70 certification communities were contacted and we received 35 replies. An interim year survey received 153 responses. We're pleased to report that the results show that assessors are increasingly satisfied with BLA processes.

### Certification Year Survey Results

When asked to rate their overall experience with the FY2018 certification review process, 60% of certification year survey respondents indicated "excellent," 31% rated it "good," 6% rated it "average," and 3% rated it as "fair." No respondents rated it as a "poor" experience.

The certification survey contained seven questions and a feedback section. One of these questions (Q1) was consistent over the last five years and revealed considerable rating improvement over that span of time.

Q1 c Please rate your overall experience with the certification review process.



Favorable responses of "excellent" and "good" increased from 65% in FY2014 and 62% in FY2015, respectively, to 97% in FY2017 and 91% in FY2018. Unfavorable ratings have seen an overall decrease from 18% in

license or ID card, or a Standard license or ID card. [Visit Mass.gov/ID](http://www.mass.gov/ID) for more information and a complete list of acceptable identification documents.

We have created a special [Info Center on our website](#) where constituents can find all the details they need about documentation requirements. The Info Center includes specific information for non-U.S. citizens, drivers over the age of 75, learner’s permit holders, and those new to Massachusetts. Thank you for assisting us in sharing this information.

**RMV Services Unavailable from 7 p.m. on March 22 until 8 a.m. on March 26**

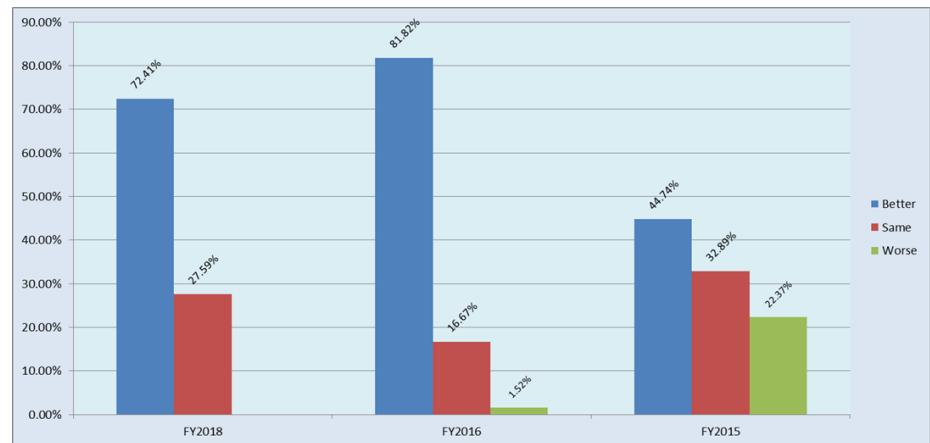
The RMV is transforming its business processes and replacing its mainframe system with new, modern technology to deliver exceptional customer service for residents and businesses across the Commonwealth. As we transition to this new system, RMV services will be unavailable from Thursday, March 22nd at 7 p.m. until Monday, March 26th at 8 a.m. to everyone except law enforcement. There will be no road tests, no vehicle inspections, no internet transactions, and no RMV services, including online or at AAA locations. All RMV Service Centers will be closed on Friday, March 23rd. [Click here for more details](#) about the services affected during cutover weekend.

**OSD Save the Date: 2018 MASSBUYS EXPO**

FY2014 and 15% in FY2015 to 0% in FY2017 and 3% in FY2018. The positive trend can likely be attributed to procedural changes made in the certification process and the shift to a more decentralized review process.

Assessors were asked to compare the FY2018 final certification review process to the prior final certification review. Of the twenty-nine responses, 72% felt the review was "better" and 28% felt the review was the "same," and no respondents indicated "worse." The chart below compares responses for the last three certifications for communities on this certification cycle.

**Q3 c How did the FY2018 final certification review compare to the prior final certification review?**  
*Prior years question: How did the certification review compare to your last certification?*



In addition to greater positive responses, the number of respondents whose certification experience was “worse” than previous has disappeared, declining from a significant 22% in FY2015 to 0% in FY2018.

On the whole, assessors were satisfied with DLS efforts to simplify the process for entering and capturing data through our Gateway application. However, assessors reported difficulty with two of the eight BLA forms on Gateway, with 8% citing challenges with the LA3 (property sales report) and 4% noting issues with the LA13 (new growth analysis). Difficulties with these reports were also noted in FY2017 surveys, indicating that there may room for improvement.

Assessors were again asked to compare the FY2018 LA13 new growth review to their prior year experience. The majority of respondents (68%) indicated that their experience was “better (easy),” with 32% categorizing it as “same (average),” and none selecting “worse (difficult).” The chart below compares assessors’ past three year’s responses to the new growth review process.

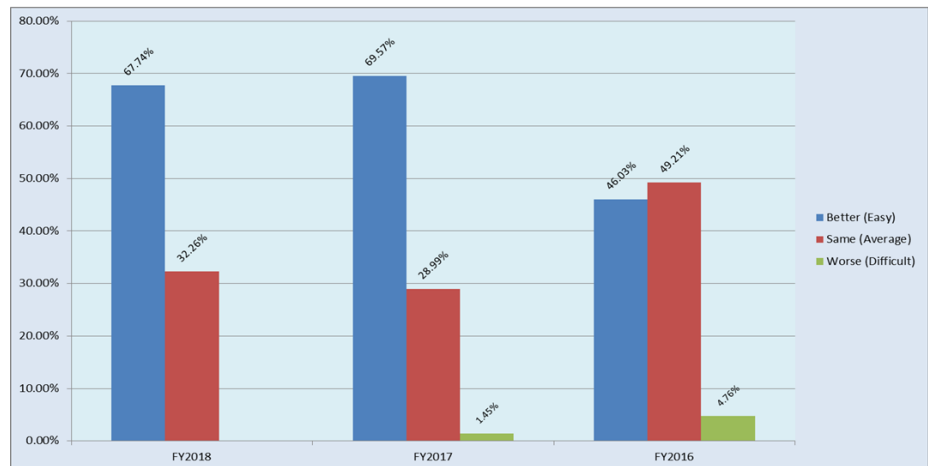
You are invited to join the Operational Services Division, statewide contract vendors, and government representatives at the 2018 MASSBUYS EXPO to be held at Gillette Stadium on May 10. We hope you will join us as we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of MASSBUYS. Check out our [video!](#)

Launched as the Star Exposition in 1999, the MASSBUYS EXPO connects businesses to government, enhancing the relationships between OSD's Statewide Contract vendors and the public purchasers across the Commonwealth who use Statewide Contracts. For the past 19 years, MASSBUYS has fostered a culture that encourages business growth, competition for the state's business, and economic development as vendors cultivate partnerships with other vendors, state agencies, local governments, and higher education.

Attendance at the MASSBUYS EXPO is reserved for Statewide Contract Vendors who exhibit at the event, employees of the Commonwealth, and employees of those [entities that are eligible](#) to purchase goods and services from OSD's Statewide Contracts. Attendee Registration will open in late March.

**Have you tried out the DLS Municipal Finance Trend Dashboard yet?**  
In [a previous edition of City](#)

**Q6 c** How did the FY2018 LA13 new growth review compare to the prior year's review of new growth?

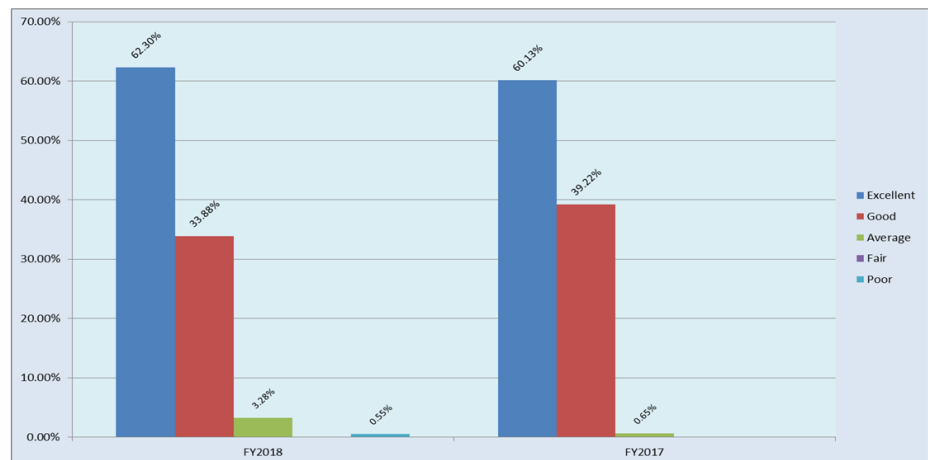


Unfavorable responses ("worse") declined from 5% in FY2015 to zero in FY2018. Additionally, totals for the highest rating ("better") increased from 46% in FY2015 to around 70% in both FY2017 and FY2018.

### Interim Year Survey Results

Widespread satisfaction with the interim year review process was clearly evident as 62% of the 153 respondents described their overall experience as "excellent," 34% described it as "good," 3% described it as "average," and one respondent called it "poor" (.55 percent). The chart below compares the FY2017 and FY2018 responses to the interim year review process.

**Q1 i** Please rate your overall experience with the FY2018 interim year review process

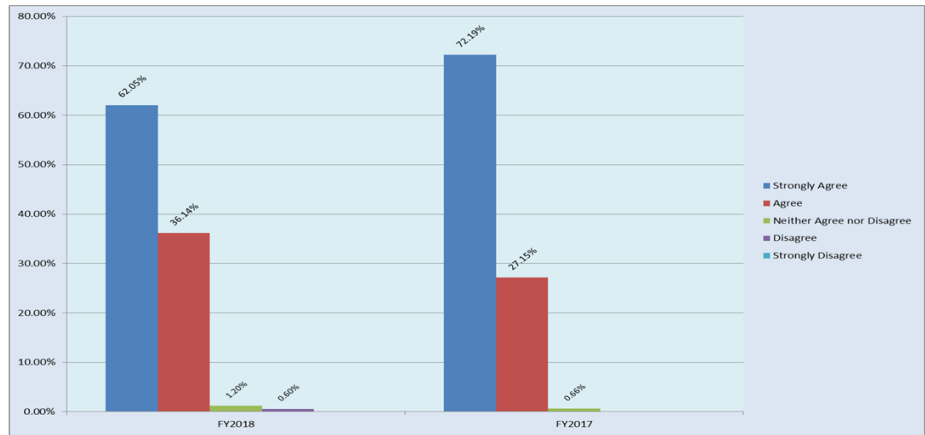


Assessors were asked whether they agreed that the LA3 Sales Report and LA15 Interim Year Review Report were reviewed and processed in a timely manner. Of the 166 respondents, 62% "strongly agreed," 36% "agreed," 1% "neither agreed nor disagreed," and one respondent "disagreed" (.60%). The results were almost identical when respondents were asked if the LA4 Classification Report and LA13 New Growth Report were reviewed and processed in a timely manner.

[& Town](#), we highlighted the comprehensive [Municipal Finance Trend Dashboard](#) now available on our website. The dashboard is comprised of key municipal fiscal health indicators and graphically displays trends in revenues and expenditures, municipal operating positions, demographic information, unfunded liabilities, property taxes, Proposition 2 ½ data, and debt. For decades, the DLS [Municipal Databank](#) has served as an invaluable resource for local and state officials, professional associations, academic institutions, bond rating agencies, advocacy organizations, think tanks, the media, and interested taxpayers for research, analysis, and policy development. We are now leveraging that resource to provide a transparent and accessible tool to analyze and visualize the fiscal health of Massachusetts' 351 cities and towns. Click [here](#) to see more!

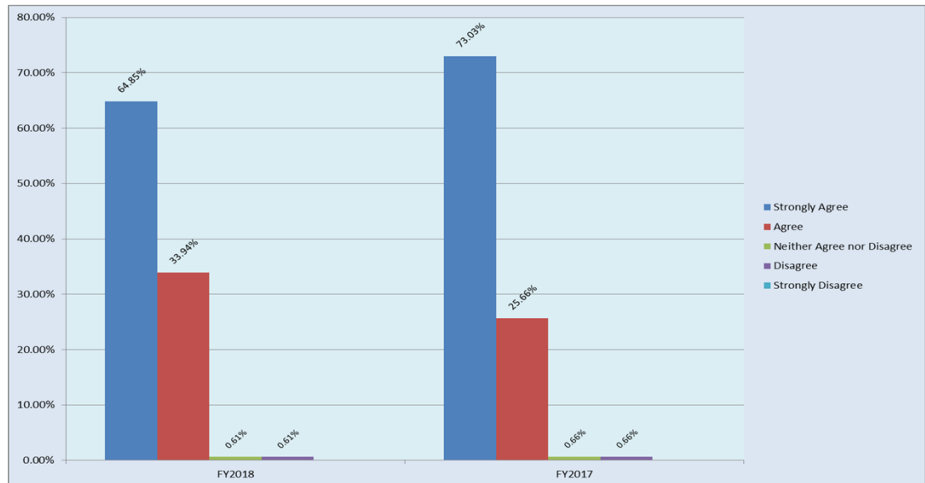


**Q3 i** Were the BLA forms - LA3 sales report and LA15 interim year review report, reviewed and processed in a timely manner?



Positive responses ("strongly agree" and "agree") were 99% for FY2017 and 98% for FY2018. There was only one negative response within the two years.

**Q4 i** Were the BLA forms- LA4 classification report and LA13 new growth report, reviewed and processed in a timely manner?



Positive responses ("strongly agree" and "agree") were 99% for FY2017 and 99% for FY2018. There was only one negative response each year.

Both surveys asked assessors if they had any concerns shifting from a triennial certification cycle to a quinquennial certification cycle. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated no concerns with the transition (87% for certification - LA3 communities and 96% for interim year communities).

With the successful decentralization of the review process instituted in the last two years, BLA does not expect significant operational changes for FY2019. Instead, our focus will be on continuing to improve the assessors experience on Gateway and strengthening our review skills. We are especially pleased that both interim and certification year reviews by BLA field staff served as positive interactions for assessors. We want to thank everyone who took the time to respond to our survey. Your input is integral to improving the way we do business.



## DLS Asks "Did You Know?"

Tony Rassias - Bureau of Accounts Deputy Director

### Other DLS Links:

[Local Officials Directory](#)

[Information Guideline Releases \(IGRs\)](#)

[Bulletins](#)

[Publications & Training Center](#)

[Tools and Financial Calculators](#)



Can you identify the ruffle-sleeved gentlemen above? Both men have an interesting connection not only to Massachusetts, but to all the New England states.

The left portrait is of a famous American Revolutionary War General who died in the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. He was born in Roxbury in 1740, graduated from Harvard College, became a leading Boston surgeon, was appointed Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and, had he lived longer, may have been a founding father. If you'd like another hint, a tavern in Charlestown is named after him.

The right portrait is of a British Vice-Admiral born in 1703. He was a popular hero in the colonies and his ship patrolled American colonial waters to provide protection from French forces during the French and Indian War of the mid-1700s. He is credited with capturing the French fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia and for other naval battles. Knighted in 1747, he owned several thousand acres in New York and died in Dublin in 1752.

Do you know who they were? If not, I'm happy to make introductions. On the left is Dr. Joseph Warren and on the right is Admiral Sir Peter Warren. They are likely of no relation to each other, but they share an interesting connection. Of all municipalities in the six New England states, only one common name is shared throughout. That name is Warren.

What some may find even more interesting is that the communities named Warren in Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts were named for Dr. Warren, while those in New Hampshire and Rhode Island were named for Admiral Warren. Warren, Vermont is said to have been named after the doctor, but could have been named for both.

If you've ever driven around New England or studied a map of the area, you probably noticed that many community names in Massachusetts also appear in other New England states. Berlin, Maine, Chester, New Hampshire and Burlington, Vermont are just three examples. Did you ever wonder which New England state has the most community names that are exactly the same as those in Massachusetts? I did. Leveraging the information on the always reliable Wikipedia, I found that answer and even more.



For example, there are no vineyards on Martha's Vineyard. North Attleborough is the Massachusetts municipality with the most letters (unhyphenated division). Of the six New England states, only Boston, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island are both their respective state's most populated city and their state's capitol. All New England states include an island as part of their territory, including Vermont.

Speaking of Vermont, it shares the most community names with Massachusetts with 71. What city or town name shared by every New England state *except* Massachusetts? It's Bristol.

I hope you enjoyed this brief trivial pursuit. As we all can attest, sometimes seeking the answer to a simple question can lead you to learn more than you ever needed to know.

## Data Highlight of the Month: [Excess Levy and Override Capacity](#)

**Anthonia Bakare - Municipal Databank**

An [Excess Levy and Override Capacity](#) report is available on the Databank website under "Reports Relating to Property Tax Data and Statistics." The report includes: levy limit without debt and capital exclusions, maximum levy limit, total tax levy, excess levy capacity, excess as a percent of maximum levy, levy ceiling, override capacity, override capacity as a percent of levy ceiling, total assessed value, and tax levy as percent of assessed value. This data is from FY2003 – 2017. The tables can be exported to Excel. Further detail on Excess Levy and Override Capacity can be found [here](#).

In January, DLS announced its new [Municipal Finance Trend Dashboard](#) which includes Excess Levy and Override Capacity under [Category Three](#) – Property Taxes. This data is presented through several charts for both excess and override capacity and can be exported to PDF.

We hope you become better acquainted with the data the Division of Local Services has to offer through the *Data Highlight of the Month*. For more information, contact us directly at [databank@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:databank@dor.state.ma.us) or (617) 626-2384.

## March Municipal Calendar

- |    |                                 |   |
|----|---------------------------------|---|
| 1  | Municipal Data/Local Aid Unit   | <b>Notification of Cherry Sheet Estimates for the Following Year (pending action taken by the Legislature)</b><br>The cherry sheet provides estimates of 1) receipts: local reimbursement and assistance program appropriations and 2) assessments: state and county assessments and charges to local governments. MDM posts cherry sheet estimates on the DLS website and updates them at every stage of the state budget process. |
| 1  | Personal Property Owner         | <b>Submit Form of List to Assessors</b><br>This return is due on or before March 1, but the Assessors may extend the deadline to a date no later than the date abatement applications are due.  |
| 1  | Charitable Organization         | <b>Submit 3ABC Forms</b><br>To be eligible for exemption from taxation for the next fiscal year, a charitable organization must file this form with the Assessors detailing the property held for charitable purposes. It is due on or before March 1, but the Assessors may extend the deadline to a date no later than the date that abatement applications are due.  |
| 1  | Telephone and Telegraph Company | <b>Deadline for Telephone and Telegraph Company to File Form of List</b><br>BLA may extend the deadline to a date no later than April 1.  |
| 31 | State Treasurer                 | <b>Notification of Monthly Local Aid Distributions</b> , see <a href="#">IGR 17-17</a> for more cherry sheet payment information, monthly breakdown by program is available <a href="#">here</a> .  |

**Editor:** Dan Bertrand

**Editorial Board:** Sean Cronin, Anthonia Bakare, Linda Bradley, Deb Joyce, Theo Kalivas, Patricia Hunt and Tony Rassias

Contact *City & Town* with questions, comments and feedback by emailing us at [cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us](mailto:cityandtown@dor.state.ma.us).

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