



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### CONTACT:

Derek Silver, Office of Senator Anne Gobi  
[Derek.Silver@MASenate.gov](mailto:Derek.Silver@MASenate.gov)

### **Senate Unanimously Passes Comprehensive Elections Bill to Address Voting Safety Concerns during COVID-19**

BOSTON (6/16/2020) – The Massachusetts State Senate on Tuesday unanimously passed legislation to expand voter access and address safety for all remaining 2020 elections, including the September 1, 2020 state primary and November 3, 2020 general election, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill, *An Act relative to voting options in response to COVID-19*, would, for the first time in state history, give all eligible residents the opportunity to vote early for the state primary and general election, allow residents to vote-by-mail, and expand absentee ballot access.

**Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)**, voted in favor of the bill and had this to say on its passage today, “Every vote is important and every voter and election workers is important too, and this bill is a great step in ensuring accessibility and maintaining safety protocols during this most unusual voting cycle. I especially appreciate all the input of my town clerks to make this a strong bill as well as all they do everyday to ensure the integrity of elections and helping to make voting easy and accessible.”

The bill does the following:

- ***Implements an early vote-by-mail system:*** An application to receive an early voting ballot will be mailed to all registered voters by July 15, 2020. The Secretary will then mail another application for the general election in the voter booklet sent out in the fall. Both applications and ballots will be postage paid.
- ***Creates early voting for the primary and expands early voting periods:*** For the first time in Massachusetts, early voting will be available for the state primary, to take place from Saturday, August 22, 2020 through Friday, August 28, 2020. Early voting for the general election would take place from Tuesday, October 17, 2020 to Friday, October 30, 2020. Early voting hours would vary according to the size of the municipality in order to give

voters ample opportunity to participate while not overburdening small towns' election departments. Voters may return their early voting ballot in the mail, in a secure drop box, or in person.

- ***Tasks the Secretary of State with creating an online portal:*** The bill requires Secretary Galvin's office to create an online portal by October 1, 2020 to make it as easy as possible for people to apply for general election early voting ballots electronically.
- ***Expands absentee voting:*** The bill provides for absentee voting by any person taking precautions related to COVID-19. Voters may also return absentee ballots via a secure drop box.
- ***Provides tools to assist clerks:*** Acknowledging the increased burden these options may place on municipalities and clerks, the bill also provides for several accommodations to make the logistics of processing votes easier. The legislation allows for tabulating ballots prior to election day, and it offers pre-addressed envelopes to voters, so their applications go directly to their clerk's office.
- ***Makes in-person voting more efficient:*** The bill allows municipalities to consolidate polling places and eliminate the check-out table at these locations, allowing for a more efficient process and fewer poll workers. It also expands who is eligible to serve as a poll worker, knowing that many current volunteers are seniors who may feel less comfortable working in public during COVID-19.

The legislation must now be reconciled with the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

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