



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

Statement on An Act to Extend Early Voting for All Elections

S.390/H.681, An Act to Extend Early Voting for All Elections, was presented by Senator Chandler and Representatives Jay D. Livingstone and Andres X. Vargas, and now sits in the Joint Committee on Election Laws. It would extend early voting to both municipal and primary elections, as well as enable 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the time of the associated general election to vote in primary elections.

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,900 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their quality of life and civic engagement during their time at MIT. MITvote is a student group that seeks to increase voter turnout among the MIT population in local, state, and federal elections. **Both of our groups support all measures that increase the civic engagement of the MIT community and promote the voting rights of students, and thus we strongly support S.390/H.681.** We also strongly support S.387/H.684, another early voting bill that is specifically for the 2020 presidential primaries.

Early voting is important for students, blue collar workers, historically disenfranchised minorities, and other people for whom it may be especially difficult to vote on Election Day. Students in particular may have classes or other scheduled activities during voting hours on Election Day, or they may have a polling location significantly far from campus and cannot leave campus for long enough to vote. Early voting gives students the option to vote on a more convenient day with fewer classes or other activities.

Massachusetts residents in general also highly utilize early voting; in the 2016 general election, 22% of voters cast early ballots.¹ In Cambridge, early voting is even more prevalent, with 27.88% of voters voting early.² However, Massachusetts only offers in-person early voting for general elections, and does not offer it for primary or municipal elections. This is in direct contrast to the 21 other states and the District of Columbia that offer in-person early voting, which offer in-person early voting for all elections instead of just some.³ With the high utilization of early voting by voters in Cambridge and throughout Massachusetts, it is clearly a highly valued alternative which improves the voting experience and civic engagement of many individuals, and thus should be extended to all elections.

The bills' provisions to enable seventeen year olds to vote in primary elections if they would be 18 by the time of the corresponding general election also would greatly increase the civic engagement of students. Eighteen states have already implemented a policy of allowing 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the general election.⁴ When Chicago implemented this policy in 2014, 17-year-olds turned out at higher rates than 20-40 year olds.⁵ Furthermore, this would allow all of those who can vote in a general election to be able to also help determine who is on the general election ballot.

Expanding early voting and granting 17-year-olds the chance to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the general election are important steps in making it easier for people to vote and enfranchising more rightful voters in Massachusetts. **We strongly urge the legislature to pass S.390/H.681.**

1. 2016 Early Voting Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/ele16/early-voting_16/ev16idx.htm

2. Massachusetts 2016 official early voting numbers. (2016, December 2). Retrieved from https://fusiontables.google.com/DataSource?docid=120IGXqicWK_I7ei41kp6cxCHAY3GOzIFf3hi8i6#rows:id=1

3. Absentee and Early Voting. National Conference of State Legislatures. (2019, April 3). Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

4. Voting Age for Primary Elections. National Conference of State Legislatures. (2018, May 9). Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primaries-voting-age.aspx>



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5. 17-year-olds voted at higher rate than parents in primary. Rick Pearson. Chicago Tribune. (2014, May 7). Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/chi-17-year-olds-voted-at-higher-rate-than-parents-in-primary-election-20140507-story.html>

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