



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

Statement on Election Day Registration

H.636, An Act relative to election day registration (satellites), was presented by Jennifer E. Benson, and now sits in the joint committee on election laws. It would establish election day registration throughout the commonwealth of Massachusetts and allow citizens to vote in an election on the same day that they register. This stands in contrast to the current deadline in which voters must register twenty days before the election in order to cast their ballot.

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 work and their civic engagement during their studies 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 H.636.**

Past legislation aimed at establishing election day voter registration, such as S.2807¹, has stalled within the state legislature. More recently, Chelsea Collaborative and MassVOTE sought to challenge the 20 day registration deadline in court, but the deadline was held up as constitutional by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court². With this decision, it has become increasingly crucial that the legislature finally move forward in making election day voter registration into law, which can be accomplished by the passage of H.636.

This bill is of particular importance to the GSC and MITvote, as it is well-known that youth voter registration and participation are the lowest of any age demographic. In 2016, only 56.8% of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 were registered to vote compared to 77.3% in the 65 to 74 demographic³. Additionally, during its extensive voter outreach efforts on election day 2018, MITvote encountered dozens of students who approached the organization seeking to register on election day but who had to be turned away without being able to vote due to a lack of election day registration in Massachusetts. By dramatically increasing the ease of registering to vote in Massachusetts, this legislation would facilitate increased voter participation among this key demographic.

Seventeen other states and the District of Columbia have established same-day or Election Day registration⁴. The presence of Election Day registration is strongly correlated with an increase in voter registration and turnout; a study on the 2008 election found that Election Day Registration led to a 9% increase in youth voter turnout over states that did not have Election Day Registration⁵. Another study found that the implementation of Election Day Registration led to a 7% increase in voter turnout in the average state, with no subsequent changes in the electorate's partisan balance⁶. H. 636 would thus not be without precedence, but rather would bring Massachusetts into a larger group of states that have seen the positive effects of such legislation on voter participation.

Election day registration is a critical step towards making Massachusetts elections more inclusive and fair, and, as such, we **strongly urge the legislature to pass H.636**. We believe that this bill's passage will contribute greatly towards the establishment of a more democratic voting process in our great Commonwealth.



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References:

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