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SENATOR ELDRIDGE VOTES TO PASS COMPREHENSIVE ELECTION REFORM BILL

BOSTON – The Senate on Thursday, January 16th voted 37-1 to pass legislation reforming the election laws in the Commonwealth by authorizing early voting for state and federal elections and primaries, allowing residents to register to vote on Election Day and creating an online voter registration system. The bill also allows 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.

“This bill would create a 21st century uniform system to make voter participation more convenient and accessible, and increase opportunities for people to vote in elections,” said Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton). “I am proud that the Senate was able to take these critical steps to strengthen the core values of civic participation and encourage voter turnout across the Commonwealth.”

Senator Eldridge has filed a bill for the past two sessions, S.325 *An Act Modernizing our Voter Registration Systems*, that mirrors the election reform bill that passed in the Senate last week. The provisions of S.315 include same-day election registration, allowing voters to register to vote online, permanent voter registration, and the pre-registration of 16 and 17-year olds.

An amendment filed by Senator Eldridge passed during the Senate debate would eliminate the requirement of a check-out table at polling places, which would reduce costs for cities and towns.

“This bill will modernize the state’s election system and bring us in line with many other states that have already successfully implemented early voting,” Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth) said.

“Supporting the right to vote should be our top priority and these changes are necessary to help us reach that goal.”

“The legislation offered today takes significant steps to update our election laws for the modern day Massachusetts family,” said Senator Barry R. Finegold (D-Andover), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws. “The time has come to make these election modernizations. Early voting, preregistration, and online voter registration will make our elections more accessible by expanding access and participation in our elections. The fundamental right of voting is the bedrock of civic engagement and our democracy.”

Under this bill, Massachusetts would join 32 other states and the District of Columbia that allow early voting. Early voting would begin 10 business days before the election and end two days before the election. The first early voting period would occur in 2016.

This bill would also place voters on the inactive list only after not voting in two consecutive federal elections and not responding to a notice from the city or town. Under current law, a voter can be placed on the inactive list for not filling out an annual census. If a voter does not vote in two additional federal elections, the voter will be removed from the voter list.

In addition to building an online voter registration system, the Secretary of State would create a secure online portal to allow voters to easily check their voter registration status and polling place.

The Senate bill and the House bill will now go to a conference committee to produce a compromise bill for final passage and consideration of the governor.

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