

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Joint Committee on Election Laws

National Popular Vote bill gives MA voters greater voice in Presidential contests

(State House, Boston) – Senator Edward M. Augustus, Jr., D-Worcester and Rep. Garrett J. Bradley, D-Hingham, today announced that the Joint Committee on Election Laws has endorsed a proposal to have Massachusetts join an interstate compact that gives voters a greater voice in how the President and Vice-President of the United States are elected.

The committee voted to release the bill with a favorable recommendation following a poll of the members. The legislation was filed by Rep. Charles Murphy, Rep. Martin Walsh, Sen. Joan Menard, and Sen. Robert Creedon, along with 25 other House and Senate co-sponsors.

“The Committee recognized that the current system is inherently undemocratic, and has become outdated and obsolete,” said House Chairman Rep. Garrett Bradley, D-Hingham. “In every other election, except for the highest office in the land, the person with the most votes wins. This would rectify this inequity in the process,” he said.

"With this legislation, every single vote in Massachusetts will count and showing up to the polls every four years will truly mean something," said Senate Chairman Sen. Edward Augustus, D-Worcester. "I am a strong supporter of voting rights and believe strongly in the theory of 'one person, one vote' originally articulated by the United States Supreme Court. Voting is an essential democratic right and it is time that we looked at increasing people's participation in that process."

Under the National Popular Vote bill, Massachusetts would join other member states in agreeing to commit their Electors to vote for the national popular vote winner, instead of using the current “winner-take-all” method used everywhere except Maine and Nebraska. This bill would guarantee that the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states will win the election.

“Massachusetts is like the vast majority of states—spectators in the Presidential race,” said Charles Murphy (D-Burlington), one of the lead sponsors. “The outcome here, and in 3/4 of the states, is not in doubt. That means no Presidential advertising in the general election, and no campaigning here. We want to make all votes equal— regardless of whether a voter lives in Massachusetts or in Ohio or in Florida.”

“Enacting this legislation will do more than any other reform to increase voter participation in Presidential elections,” said Pam Wilmot, Common Cause of Massachusetts Executive Director. “The vast majority of votes just don’t count under the current system.”

According to the sponsors of National Popular Vote, Presidential candidates concentrate two-thirds of their advertising money and campaign visits in just 5 states, and 99 percent of their advertising money in just 16 states.

"We are extremely pleased that the National Popular Vote legislation is moving forward in Massachusetts," said Barry Fadem President of National Popular Vote, the non-profit group leading the effort nationwide. "This reform will give all voters, whether in Massachusetts or in Florida, an equal say in the most important election in the world-- the election for the President of the United States."

Some scholars believe that the National Popular Vote bill also reforms a system which was created along with the infamous 3/5ths Clause of the Constitution to benefit southern states with large slave populations. The South had very few qualified voters and would have been out-voted by the more populous North. With the 3/5ths compromise, slaves were counted in establishing congressional districts, and with the electoral college based on the number of congressional districts plus two, southern states were able to elect the lion's share of early Presidents.

The agreement would only take effect once a number of states having a combined number of Electors totaling at least 270 had joined the compact. There are 538 Electors allotted to the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. A simple majority (270) is required for election as President and Vice-President. The State of Maryland has passed the law, and similar legislation is pending in at least 46 other states including Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont.

The U.S. Constitution gives states exclusive authority to choose Presidential Electors, and also allows states to enter into interstate agreements.

The bill still requires approval of the full House and Senate before it can be sent to the Governor.

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