

SENATOR BECCA RAUSCH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 15, 2020

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SEN. RAUSCH, REP. MADARO FILE UNIVERSAL VOTE BY MAIL LEGISLATION FOR 2020 STATEWIDE ELECTIONS

*Affecting 2020 state elections, the legislation will safeguard
public health and our democratic process throughout the COVID-19 pandemic*

Boston, MA – **Senator Becca Rausch** (D-Needham) and **Representative Adrian Madaro** (D-Boston) filed SD. 2912/HD. 5026, An Act establishing vote by mail in 2020, a bill to implement comprehensive voting by mail for all statewide elections in 2020. The recent Wisconsin election and experiences in other states make clear that Massachusetts must act now to safeguard the right to vote during the unprecedented COVID-19 public health crisis.

The 2020 Vote by Mail Act would expand existing early voting procedures in Massachusetts by mailing ballots to registered voters for both the September 1 primary election and the November 3 general election. For the general, every registered voter would receive a ballot. For the primary, every voter registered with a political party would automatically receive their party's primary ballot; unenrolled voters may request a primary ballot for any political party. The legislation also maintains in-person voting options and requires that the state provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for poll workers if the Governor's COVID-19 state of emergency is in effect, or as the circumstances of the pandemic may necessitate. The vote by mail provisions of the bill will sunset at the close of 2020 and will not apply to future elections outside of this year.

While the automatic vote by mail provisions only apply to the statewide elections in 2020, some additional provisions will be permanent, including election day as a statewide holiday, funding sources, technological enhancements to the voting process, and allowing clerks and municipal elections departments to process early ballots before election day.

Senator Rausch said, "Free, open, and accessible elections are a central pillar of our democracy. We're facing a global pandemic that makes traditional in-person voting seriously concerning if not downright dangerous, so we must proactively pursue alternative voting methods. We do this by expanding a process we already know to be viable in our Commonwealth. Under the 2020 Vote by Mail Act, every registered Massachusetts voter will receive a ballot that they can cast safely and securely, without jeopardizing their health or anyone else's, knowing that their ballot will be counted. COVID-19 must not strip us of our right and ability to vote; we must protect our elections,

especially in times of crisis. We cannot afford to wait and see how the rest of this pandemic period unfolds.”

“As we look toward an uncertain future in the midst of the COVID-19 emergency, we must be prepared to safeguard the vital civic institution of our elections against all possibility of disruption,” said Rep. Madaro. “At the beginning of the legislative session last year, I filed the only bill that would guarantee all Massachusetts voters the right to request their ballots by mail. Now, I am proud to co-file the 2020 Vote by Mail Act to protect our elections in the midst of this crisis. By providing each Massachusetts voter with an early voting mail ballot, we know that we are protecting their right to vote no matter what September or November brings. Mail voting already works in Massachusetts; we process thousands of mail-in absentee ballots every election with no issue. No matter what path this pandemic takes, the 2020 Vote by Mail Act will ensure Massachusetts residents are prepared and able to vote this fall.”

The bill provides that the costs of expanded early voting by mail will be handled by the state, in substantial part by using federal funds already on hand, appropriated to the state under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). The legislature would appropriate additional funds as needed to cover implementation costs after HAVA funds have been exhausted. The sponsors look to the Congressional delegation to protect the full functionality of the United States Postal Service, critical to a vote by mail system.

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Senator Becca Rausch represents the Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex District, comprised of Attleboro, Franklin, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, North Attleborough, Plainville, Sherborn, Wayland, Wellesley, and Wrentham. Currently in her first term, Senator Rausch serves as the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government and the Senate Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs.