

SENATE No. 2608

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

—
In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court
(2019-2020)
—

SENATE, March 23, 2020.

The committee on Senate Ways and Means to whom was referred the House Bill relative to host community agreements (House, No. 4398),-- reported, in part, a "Bill granting authority to postpone 2020 municipal elections in the commonwealth and increase voting options in response to the declaration of emergency to respond to COVID-19" (Senate, No. 2608).

For the committee,
Michael J. Rodrigues

SENATE No. 2608

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court
(2019-2020)**

An Act granting authority to postpone 2020 municipal elections in the commonwealth and increase voting options in response to the declaration of emergency to respond to COVID-19.

Whereas, The deferred operation of this act would tend to defeat its purpose, which is to forthwith provide for the rescheduling of elections as a result of the declaration of emergency to respond to COVID-19 and to increase voting options, therefore it is hereby declared to be an emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public convenience.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. (a) Notwithstanding section 9 of chapter 39, sections 26 and 28 of chapter
2 51 and chapters 53 and 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law or by-law to
3 the contrary, any city or town with any municipal caucus or annual or special municipal election
4 scheduled between the effective date of this act and May 30, 2020, may postpone such municipal
5 caucus or municipal election in accordance with this act.

6 The select board, town council, board of registrars or city council of the city or town may
7 vote on any day prior to the date of their scheduled municipal caucus or municipal election to
8 postpone the municipal caucus or municipal election to a date certain on or before June 30, 2020.
9 Such rescheduled caucus or election shall be held in accordance with all applicable election laws
10 except as otherwise provided in this act.

11 (b) The select board, town council or city council of a city or town postponing a
12 municipal caucus or municipal election pursuant to this act shall, following consultation with the
13 local election official and the chief operating officer of the municipality as to logistics and
14 feasibility, vote to reschedule the municipal caucus or municipal election. A copy of this act, the
15 vote of the select board, town council or city council and a sample ballot shall be placed on the
16 official municipal website not later than 20 days before the date to which the rescheduled caucus
17 or election has been postponed. Notice of such action shall be provided to the public in other
18 ways reasonably calculated to enable eligible voters to learn of the rescheduled election date and
19 to cast ballots therein. The notice may include, but shall not be limited to, a “reverse-911” call,
20 municipal list-serve notifications, advertisement on local cable television or issuance of a press
21 release sent to local news media.

22 (c) Consistent with section 107 of chapter 41 of the General Laws, an incumbent elected
23 official whose term would have expired at a municipal annual town election if the election was
24 not postponed pursuant to this act shall continue to serve in the official’s position until a
25 successor is elected and qualified.

26 (d) If this act does not take effect until after the date of a scheduled municipal caucus or
27 municipal election during the state of emergency declared by the governor pursuant to executive
28 order 591, Declaration of a State of Emergency to Respond to COVID-19, the actions of the
29 board of selectmen, town council, city council and local election officials to postpone a
30 municipal caucus or municipal election shall be ratified, validated and confirmed as if this act
31 had been in place prior thereto.

32 SECTION 2. The last day to register to vote for any annual or special municipal or state
33 election postponed pursuant to this act or otherwise postponed in response to COVID-19 shall
34 be 10 days before the date to which the rescheduled election has been postponed; provided,
35 however, that the board of registrars shall hold a registration session on that date not less than
36 from 2 PM to 4 PM and from 7 PM to 8 PM. The voting list to be used at such rescheduled
37 election shall include all eligible voters registered as of that date.

38 SECTION 3. The caucus or election materials, including, but not limited to, absentee and
39 official ballots, prepared for a municipal caucus or any annual or special municipal or state
40 election postponed pursuant to this act or otherwise postponed in response to COVID-19 and
41 bearing that date shall be used for the rescheduled caucus or election to the extent practicable. If
42 additional ballots are required to be printed, the ballots shall be identical in form to those
43 prepared for the original caucus or election.

44 SECTION 4. Absentee ballots cast in connection with the original election date for any
45 annual or special municipal or state election postponed pursuant to this act or otherwise
46 postponed in response to COVID-19, whether returned before the original election or otherwise,
47 and received by the local election official before the close of polls on the date of the rescheduled
48 election, shall be processed in accordance with applicable law; provided, however, that any voter
49 who chooses to vote in person on the date of the rescheduled election may do so if their absentee
50 ballot has not yet been counted. Completed applications to vote by absentee ballot in the
51 rescheduled election shall be accepted by the board of registrars until 12:00 noon on the last
52 business day before the rescheduled election.

53 For an election held on or before June 30, 2020 any person taking precaution related to
54 COVID-19 in response to a declared state of emergency or from guidance from a medical
55 professional, local or state health official, or any civil authority shall be deemed to be unable by
56 reason of physical disability to cast their vote in person at a polling location.

57 SECTION 5. (a) Notwithstanding section 25B of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any
58 other general or special law to the contrary, any eligible voter may vote early by mail for any
59 annual or special municipal or state election held on or before June 30, 2020.

60 (b) Any qualified voter wanting to early vote by mail may file with their local election
61 official an application for an early voting ballot. Any form of written communication evidencing
62 a desire to have an early voting ballot be sent for use for voting at an election shall be given the
63 same effect as an application made in the form prescribed by the state secretary. Local election
64 officials shall send early voting by mail ballots to those who have applied as soon as ballots are
65 available. No application shall be deemed to be seasonably filed unless it is received in the office
66 of the local election official before noon on the last business day before the date on which the
67 rescheduled election is held.

68 (c) Local election officials may use absentee ballots for those voters requesting to vote
69 early by mail in municipal elections. An early voting ballot along with an envelope bearing an
70 affidavit as set forth in section 25B of chapter 54 of the General Laws shall be provided to each
71 qualified voter who participates in early voting by mail.

72 (d) The local election officials shall cause to be placed on the voting lists opposite the
73 name of a qualified voter who participates in early voting the letters "EV" designating an early
74 voter.

75 (e) The counting of early voting ballots shall be consistent with section 25B of chapter 54
76 of the General Laws and implemented regulations to the extent practicable. All envelopes
77 referred to in this section shall be retained with the ballots cast at the election and shall be
78 preserved and destroyed in the manner provided by law for the retention, preservation or
79 destruction of official ballots.

80 (f) All early voting ballots voted by mail shall be received by the town clerk before the
81 hour fixed for closing the polls on the date on which the rescheduled election is held. Early
82 voting ballots cast under the authority of this section shall be processed at the polls in a manner
83 consistent with that set forth in said section 25B of said chapter 54.