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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rep. Gordon, House Pass Legislation to Expand Voting Options and Support the Commonwealth's Restaurants During the COVID-19 Pandemic

BOSTON - Representative Ken Gordon (D - Bedford) and his House colleagues passed a bill on Thursday to significantly expand mail-in and in-person early voting options for the upcoming September and November elections in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The legislation was passed in near unanimous fashion one day after the House expanded opportunities for restaurants to provide outdoor seating, offer sealed cocktails to go, and capped the fees delivery services can charge for their services.

Under the election bill, every registered voter in the Commonwealth will receive an absentee ballot request form for the Sept. 1 primary and Nov. 3 general elections. The Secretary of State will mail these applications with return postage to registered voters by July 15, 2020. Voters may return their applications by mail or request their absentee ballot through an online portal. Completed absentee ballots will be accepted by mail, in a secure drop box, or in person before close of polls on the day of the primary or general election. The bill also permits early mail-in voting for any city or town elections that fall on or before December 31, 2020.

“No one should be expected to cast their ballot at the expense of their health,” said Rep. Gordon, whose district includes Burlington, Bedford, and the precinct 3 in Wilmington. “We acted decisively to ensure that all voters have the opportunity to participate in the critically important elections coming this fall.”

Voters who prefer to vote in person will have the option to vote early or on Election Day. The bill adds a seven day period of Early Voting for the September Primary (8/33 to 8/28) and expands the early voting period to fourteen days for the November General Election (10/1 to 10/30). Both Early Voting periods include weekends and voters will still be able to vote on

Election Day if they choose. All polling locations will have protocols in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 such as requiring social distancing, face coverings, and frequent use of sanitizers.

The bill reduces the deadline for eligible residents to register to vote from 20 days before the election to 10.

The House also passed a package this week to help restaurants weather the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. The package:

- Streamlines the Alcohol Beverage Control Commission (ABCC) approval process for restaurants to establish outdoor seating by waiving the approval of these licenses. It only requires restaurants to notify the ABCC and file their outdoor seating plan;
- Allows municipalities to temporarily suspend some relevant local zoning laws if they wish to do so;
- Waives interest and late penalties for restaurants on their meals tax payments until December 2020;
- Allows restaurants to include cocktails to-go with take-out food until February 2020;
- Caps commissions on on-line restaurant delivery at 15% across the board so that these apps can continue to operate without placing an undue burden on our restaurants.

These bills will now go to the Senate for consideration.

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