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Friedman, Gordon Support Critical Legislation to Safeguard Fall 2020 Elections

(7/7/2020) – Representative Ken Gordon (D-Bedford) and Senator Cindy Friedman (D-Arlington) joined their colleagues in the Massachusetts Legislature last week to pass a bill that expands voter access and ensures voters have safe voting options for all remaining 2020 elections, including the September 1, 2020 state primary and November 3, 2020 general election, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The bill was signed into law by the Governor on July 6, 2020.

The legislation establishes a vote-by-mail option and early voting period for the upcoming fall elections. In addition to those options, the bill also addresses polling place safety for those who choose to cast their ballots in person.

“As we continue to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that Massachusetts voters can safely cast their ballot in our upcoming elections without risking exposure to the virus,” said **Senator Friedman**. “This historic bill expands voting options to do just that, strengthening our democracy and promoting voter participation this fall. I’d like to thank my colleagues in the Senate and House for their hard work on this important bill.”

“No one should have to compromise their health in order to participate in our democracy” said **Representative Gordon**. “This legislation ensures that anyone can vote safely whether they choose to vote by mail or at the polls. I am proud that the Legislature acted decisively to safeguard the critical fall elections and that the Governor quickly acted on this bill”.

The new law contains the following components:

Implements an early vote-by-mail system: An application to receive an early voting ballot for the primary will be mailed to all registered voters by July 15, 2020. The Secretary will then mail another application for the general election by September 14, 2020. Both applications and ballots will have postage costs already paid for.

Ballots postmarked on or before November 3, 2020 will be counted until Friday November 6, 2020 at 5.PM. Applications for early voting and absentee voting must be received 4 business days before the election, by Wednesday August 26 2020 (for the primary) and Wednesday Oct. 28 2020.

Creates early voting for the primary and expands early voting periods: For the first time in Massachusetts, early voting will be available for the state primary, and will take place from Saturday, August 22, 2020 through Friday, August 28, 2020. Early voting for the general election is scheduled to take place from Tuesday, October 17, 2020 to Friday, October 30, 2020.

Makes in-person voting safer and more efficient: The legislation allows municipalities, with proper notice, to consolidate polling places and eliminate the check-out table at these locations, allowing for a more efficient process and fewer poll workers. It also expands who is eligible to serve as a poll worker, knowing that many current volunteers are seniors who may feel less comfortable working in public during COVID-19.

Provides tools to assist clerks: Acknowledging the increased burden these options may place on municipalities and clerks, the legislation also provides for several accommodations to make the logistics of processing votes easier. The legislation allows for tabulating ballots prior to election day, and it offers pre-addressed envelopes to voters, so their applications go directly to their clerk's office.

Tasks the Secretary of State with creating an online portal and promoting voting options: To make it as easy as possible for people to apply for general election early voting, the legislation requires Secretary Galvin's office to create an online portal not later than October 1, 2020. Electronic applications for early voting will be available for the general election, and if feasible, for the primary election.

Finally, the Secretary of State will conduct a public awareness campaign to inform and notify voters of the many options available to cast a vote in upcoming 2020 elections.

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