With Automatic Voter Registration, eligible citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who interact with the Registry of Motor Vehicles and other State agencies will automatically be registered to vote, unless they opt out. The legislation also requires Massachusetts to further improve the accuracy of voting rolls by joining the Electronic Registration Information Center.

The Bill
S.373/H.2091: An Act automatically registering eligible voters and enhancing safeguards against fraud

Elevator Speech
Hi, we are Jonathan Goldman and Ravi Simon and we’re politics students with experience in public service and residents in Massachusetts. In order to give our communities a voice and improve the common good, it is imperative every citizen of the Commonwealth has the opportunity to vote. But that isn’t happening. Massachusetts has the 3rd worst voter roll in the United States. This means that thousands of voters are registered with wrong names and addresses. There are registered voters who no longer exist and there are voters who have registered but do not appear on the State’s voter roll. As a result, not only are we denying people the right to vote and wasting money in the process, but we take away people’s voice in government.

Automatic Voter Registration is a solution to this problem. With AVR, every eligible citizen of the Commonwealth who interacts with the RMV and other State agencies will be automatically registered to vote. The legislation also requires Massachusetts to further improve the accuracy of our voting rolls by joining the Electronic Registration Information Center. In Massachusetts, the communities with the lowest rates of registration are also the same communities who have been historically disenfranchised and prevented from being able to be at the ballot box. The areas with some of the worst environmental problems are the same areas with low registration. With a vote, we empower these communities.

Will Representative/Senator X speak with Speaker DeLeo to include Automatic Voter Registration on this year’s agenda so we can get a vote passed?
**Excerpts from Storybook**

Expert Testimony from Attorney General Maura Healey: “By automatically registering eligible citizens to vote, we make it easier for them to engage and participate in the electoral process. This makes our elections more accessible to all – particularly young people, those who move frequently, and minority voters.”

Emily Norton, Executive Director of MA Sierra Club: “Lifting barriers for individuals to vote can’t hurt; it can only make our elected officials more representative. Sierra Club supports this effort because lowering barriers to vote ensures that communities can receive environmental justice.”

**Op-Ed**

**Jonathan**

While we applaud ourselves for registering 500 voters at the March for Our Lives events, all of these children and adults could have already been registered if we had Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) in Massachusetts.

There are 700,000 unregistered voters in Massachusetts. Massachusetts is supposed to be the leader of progressive change, yet ten states and the District of Columbia have already approved AVR. We’re falling behind.

AVR is a simple, secure, and effective solution for both registering voters and engaging more voters. First, AVR is a seamless system which integrates voter registration into the RMV and MassHealth. Once the RMV or MassHealth collects the information required to register to vote, this information is electronically transferred to the central voter database and local registrars without additional forms or paperwork.

Second, as a part of AVR, Massachusetts would join the inter-state Electronic Registration Information Center which would add additional safeguards to our voting system which is currently one of the worst in the nation. As pointed out by Common Cause President Pam Wilmot in a recent interview, we “already collect key information about citizens and whether they’re eligible to vote” and in MassHealth you need to be a U.S. Citizen, so AVR would only make our systems even more secure.

Third, AVR has the potential to increase turnout and decrease costs. Oregon saw a 4.2% increase in turnout. Several states which have implemented AVR have also seen savings of $100,000s. This means that the savings from AVR could be funneled into improving our voting systems, for example, supporting our town and city clerks with early voting.

Let’s not wait for another massive social movement to register more voters. Let’s get this done today. Let’s pass AVR in Massachusetts.

**House Ways and Means Script**

My name is Jonathan Goldman and I am a Democratic State Committee Member, resident of Northampton, and student at Brandeis University. I am here with my colleague, Ravi Simon, a former intern for Representative Gentile, resident of Sudbury, and also a student at Brandeis. Over the past few months, we have been working on passing House Bill 2091: An Act automatically registering eligible voters and enhancing safeguards against fraud. As you may know, the lead sponsor on this bill was Representative Kocot who sadly passed away last week. Not only was he my representative, but he was someone I deeply respected. Now, more than ever, we are working hard to make sure his efforts in passing this bill were not in vain. We need your help in ensuring this bill is a priority for your committee and that it is voted out favorably.

AVR is an issue of importance to Ravi and me. This is because there are 680,000 eligible, but unregistered, voters in our Commonwealth. In order to give our communities a voice and improve the common good, it is imperative every citizen of the Commonwealth has the opportunity to vote.

The ballot box is the vehicle for the voice of the people to reach town halls and Beacon Street. Yet, with less than 30% of voters participating in the last cycle of municipal elections, we need a jump-start to get more people involved.

AVR is the solution. Lowering the barriers to vote is critical to upholding the constitutional right to vote. Unfortunately, within the Commonwealth, the communities with the lowest rates of registration are also the same communities who have been historically disenfranchised and unable to access the ballot box. The areas with some of the worst environmental problems, issues such as pollution or waste, are the same areas with low registration. This is why reputable organizations such as the Sierra Club, Progressive Mass, ACLU, and over 60 others have come out to advocate for the passage of H. 2091.

With Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), eligible citizens of the Commonwealth who interact with the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) and other State agencies automatically would be registered to vote, unless they say no. The legislation also requires Massachusetts to further improve the accuracy of our voting rolls by joining the Electronic Registration Information Center.

We know that AVR works. Take Oregon, for example, where AVR was implemented in 2015. They saw a 4% increase in voter turnout in the very next election cycle. Vermont is another great example. Between January and June 2017, after the implementation of AVR, Vermont processed or updated 12,344 voter registrations through their DMV. This was roughly a 62% increase from the previous year, which was an election year, unlike 2017. AVR in Massachusetts is a practical progressive issue which can bring this same boost to our Commonwealth.
I understand you may have potential concerns about how to pay for H. 2091, but the truth is that the finances which underpin AVR are completely sound. Implementation costs can be easily and fully covered by the State’s Federal Help America Vote account. After the controversy surrounding the Presidential Election in 2000, Congress recognized the necessity of reforming our nation’s voting systems. The Federal Government has continued to allocate funding to States since 2002 in order to ensure that critical election infrastructure gets updated. As a result, Massachusetts has tens of millions of dollars that can only be used for initiatives like AVR. The Commonwealth needs to make use of this money. Massachusetts has the 3rd worst voter roll in the United States, meaning that thousands of voters are registered with wrong names and wrong addresses. There are registered voters who no longer exist and there are voters who have registered but do not appear on the State’s voter roll. We need to use the money which Congress has allocated in order to catch up with the rest of the country.

Not only would AVR not cost taxpayers any money, but, based on implementation of AVR in other States like Oregon, AVR would actually save Massachusetts $100,000s of dollars. In the long-run, shifting to electronic systems will make the work of Town Clerks more efficient, eliminate costs from paper and ink, and make the system overall run far more smoothly. This is one of the many reasons that the Massachusetts Town Clerks Association have indicated they would be happy to see the passage of the House and Senate bills.

Mr. Chairman, I implore you to make this bill a priority and vote it out of committee favorably. By supporting this bill, you can elevate the voices of hardworking citizens and their communities so that they may be able to effectively advocate for themselves. Thank you.

---

**Letter to the Legislator**

My name is Ravi Simon and I am writing to you along with Jonathan Goldman. In addition to being students at Brandeis University, we are residents of Sudbury and Northampton, respectively. I recently interned with Rep. Gentile and Jonathan is the youngest member of the Democratic State Committee.

We first want to thank you for co-sponsoring H. 2091, An Act automatically registering eligible voters and enhancing safeguards against fraud. Your support in passing this legislation means a lot to Jonathan and me. There is more work that needs to be done, however, in order to get the bill passed.

Jonathan and I are lucky. We come from privileged backgrounds which helped us to be engaged. Unfortunately, for the 680,000 eligible but unregistered voters in Massachusetts, that isn’t the case. This means that they’re missing the opportunity to have a voice in government to bring the change they need.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is a solution to this problem. With AVR, every eligible citizen of the Commonwealth who interacts with the RMV and other State agencies will be automatically registered to vote. The legislation also requires Massachusetts to further improve the accuracy of our voting rolls by joining the Electronic Registration Information Center.

Not only would AVR not cost taxpayers any money, but, based on implementation of AVR in other States like Oregon and Vermont, AVR would actually save Massachusetts $100,000s of dollars. Implementation costs can be easily and fully covered by the State’s Federal Help America Vote account, which has tens of millions of dollars and can only be used for initiatives like AVR.

In addition to saving money, passing AVR in MA would also increase voter participation. Oregon and Vermont both reported a substantial increase in voter turnout when they passed AVR. In Massachusetts, this would translate to mobilizing students like us at the four colleges and Universities in your district, empowering more people to get involved, and improving political representation.

Our ask is simple. As you may know, the AVR bills S.1791 and H.2091 were recently voted out favorably from the Joint Committee on Election Laws and we expect the bill to come before the House Ways and Means Committee and House Steering Committee. In order to ensure this bill passes, we are requesting that you write a letter in support of AVR to Chairman Jeffrey Sánchez of the House Ways and Means Committee and Chairman James M. Murphy of the House Steering Committee.

---

**Excerpts from Campaign Journals**

Jonathan

**On Automatic Voter Registration Lobby Day**

With well over 50 attendees and nearly 20 organizations from the Elections Modernization Coalition of Massachusetts, I was impressed by the energy in the room. The purpose of the meeting was to teach people about AVR, organize them into lobby groups, and then have attendees go to their legislators and push them in favor of AVR. While this was not the first time AVR had been introduced, with a large number of co-sponsors, this session looked like the most favorable opportunity to pass AVR so they were attending to capitalize on that momentum. The meeting began with an introduction of AVR followed by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey and lead Co-Sponsor Senator Cynthia Creem helping excite everyone and build up the importance of AVR.
With everyone excited after hearing the widely popular A.G. and Senator, each co-sponsoring organization in attendance had two minutes to explain why they supported AVR. The message which most stuck with me was from the Massachusetts Sierra Club Executive Director, Emily Norton, who pointed to the correlation of environmental disenfranchisement and areas of high voter suppression and a lack of registration.

In a follow-up phone call with Emily, I wanted to talk with her to learn more about what she viewed as the most effective ways to communicate the importance of AVR. The meeting was brief but substantive. Emily talked about the correlation between areas with high pollution and areas of low voter turnout and low voter registration. She then tied this to how AVR can be a tool of empowerment and holding people accountable. Noting that this messaging could turn off some people in power who were enjoying not being held accountable, Emily said that a better tactic could be saying that AVR empowers and makes sure more voices are heard.

Ravi

On a meeting with Representative John W. Scibak

We met with Representative Scibak and his legislative aide shortly after the meeting with Devon Nir (Common Cause, MA) to record him talking about AVR. This was actually a follow up meeting which we had planned a couple weeks prior, when we had visited the Statehouse on a class visit. When we originally visited Representative Scibak’s office, he was in legislative session and unavailable. His staff director, Kate Cone, however, took time out of her schedule to talk to us for over ten minutes about AVR. At the end, she offered to set up a meeting with the Representative.

When we first met Representative Scibak, I found him to be a little prickly. He talked quite a bit about how he wanted the meeting to be short. Yet, it quickly became clear that Representative Scibak cared deeply about AVR. He articulated some of the arguments in favor of AVR, such as the importance of turnout, in really compelling ways based on personal experience.

One aspect of the meeting, which went particularly well, was the way in which we opened the conversation. Recognizing that the Representative was a little impatient and rather busy, Jonathan and I started by discussing the passing of Representative Kocot. We told him that we had been looking to have Representatives from Western Massachusetts rally to ensure his legacy and advocate for his bills, including AVR. At the sound of his name, Representative Scibak’s face and features softened and he became more receptive. Afterwards he readily agreed to be in our video. It was a powerful example of how personal connections can really cut through a meeting.

- **Update**

As of June 27, 2018, the bill has passed, with an amendment, by the House Committee on Ways and Means.

---

For more information

View the bill:
malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H4320

Common Cause Massachusetts
commoncause.org/massachusetts