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## How the New Law Will Affect Fall Elections and League Work

Governor Baker signed [H.4820](#), An Act relative to voting options in response to COVID-19, into law Monday, July 6. The League congratulates everyone involved in passing this important measure to assure that our Sept. 1 primary election and Nov. 3 general election are held in a way that increases the safety of voters and poll workers, eases the workload on local election officials, and creates confidence in the conduct of these elections. The final bill passed unanimously in the Senate and by a 157-1 vote in the House. Thanks to all of you who urged your legislators to act on this bill.

We urge League members and local Leagues to take note of the law's provisions below, to take action to inform voters of the changes and how to vote by mail if they wish to do so, and to offer to assist your local election officials in dealing with the expected increase in mailed ballots and the shortage of poll workers.

Here are the major provisions of the law that directly affect voters:

- An application for a mail ballot will be sent by July 15 to every voter registered by July 1 before the primary election and by Sept. 14 to every voter registered by Sept. 1 before the general election.
- Applications must be returned to local election officials by four days before the election. That is a very tight deadline to receive and return a ballot. Encourage voters to apply for ballots early. Voters who apply but do not receive a ballot or who receive a ballot but do not return it can still vote in person.
- Voters can request which language they would like for their mailed ballot.
- Election officials must send an acknowledgement notice and application for a mail ballot to any voter who registers or changes their address between July 1 and Aug. 22, and between Sept. 1 and Oct. 24.
- In-person early voting is Aug. 22-28 before the primary and Oct. 17-30 before the November election and must include some weekend hours.
- Voter registration deadline is 10 days before the election instead of 20 days, so Aug. 22 for the primary election and Oct. 24 for the general election.
- Postage-paid return will be provided for applications and mailed ballots.

- An online portal where a voter can request a mail ballot instead of submitting a paper application will be created by the Secretary of the Commonwealth by Oct. 1 at the latest.

Here are the major provisions that directly affect local election officials and how elections will be held:

- Local election officials can process mailed ballots in a central location before Election Day. No results will be tabulated or reported until polls close. Mailed ballots will not have to be delivered to individual precinct polling places.
- Voters can deposit ballots in secure drop boxes where provided. Ballots can also be returned in person to local election official offices. Encourage your town to provide such a drop box.
- If polling locations are changed, those changes must be made and the public notified 20 days before the election.
- For November election, ballots will be counted if mailed on or before Election Day and received by Nov. 6. For the primary election, ballots must be received by Election Day to be counted.
- Removes some restrictions for poll workers, including political party affiliation, voter status and residence.
- Allows elimination of checkout table at polls to reduce the number of poll workers needed.
- Authorizes electronic poll books.
- Secretary of the Commonwealth will establish regulations with the Department of Public Health to safeguard health of voters and election workers at polls.

Our partners at the Massachusetts Voter Table have created a fantastic toolkit with timelines and information for educating voters about these changes and have made it available to the League. Take a look at the [toolkit here](#) and see how you can use it in your League work. Thank you, Voter Table!

The Secretary of the Commonwealth's office has a list of FAQs on voting by mail [here](#), and there's an application for mailed ballots online [here](#) to download and return.

The Voter Table will also be operating phone banks to contact residents in areas with historically low voter turnout and urge people to register and vote. They need people to make those calls. The first phone banks are scheduled for Wednesday, July 15, and more will be added going forward. If you would like to volunteer, click [here](#).