



MAURA HEALEY
ATTORNEY GENERAL

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
ONE ASHBURTON PLACE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02108

(617) 727-2200
(617) 727-4765 TTY
www.mass.gov/ago

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MEDIA CONTACT:
Emalie Gainey (AGO)
(617) 727-2543

Carrie Hill (MSA)
Carrie.Hill@state.ma.us

**AG HEALEY, MASS. SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION UNDERTAKE STATEWIDE
EFFORT TO SUPPORT VOTING RIGHTS OF INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS**

BOSTON – To ensure the right to vote is protected and afforded to every eligible voter in Massachusetts, Attorney General Maura Healey and the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association have joined together to ensure incarcerated individuals who are eligible to vote in the state have access to important voting information, understand their voting rights, and have the ability to vote.

“Our democracy depends on ensuring that every eligible voter is afforded their right to vote, and that includes incarcerated individuals, who are often some of the most marginalized people in our society,” said **AG Healey**. “I am pleased to help build on the important work of Secretary Galvin and support the efforts of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association and voting rights organizations to make sure that these individuals have the information and access to have their voice heard. Every eligible voter deserves to be able to cast their vote and have that vote counted.”

“As President of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association, I would like to thank Attorney General Healey, Secretary of the Commonwealth Galvin, hardworking staff members in our individual offices and clerks across the Commonwealth for their work and support on this important issue. Sheriffs know that civic engagement is a critical component of successful reentry,” said **Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian**. “Here at the Middlesex Sheriff's Office, we have worked both internally – and with external partners like the League of Women Voters – for many years to ensure those in our custody understand their voting rights and can cast ballots if they wish to do so. Over the past year, we have also expanded our efforts, helping more than 150 individuals register to vote as they prepared for reentry. These are ongoing, continuing endeavors to which we are wholly committed.”

Collaborations being undertaken with the AG's Office build upon existing initiatives that are underway in each of the 13 sheriff's offices where inmates and detainees are held. These existing efforts include informing all individuals about election dates and deadlines; making absentee ballot request forms available; and assisting individuals with the completion of forms to ensure ballots arrive in a timely manner and can be returned in a timely fashion.

"The Barnstable County Sheriff's Office has written procedures in place for inmate voting and our programs staff works with inmates to ensure they are informed and assisted in the voting process," said **Barnstable County Sheriff James Cummings**. "We hope this sets an example in following the law. Our ultimate goal is that inmates will get involved and become law abiding productive citizens."

"We recognize the importance of protecting the constitutional rights of individuals and are proud of the efforts that our Office and the other Sheriffs have taken to educate and remind those eligible in our care and custody of their right to vote," **Essex County Sheriff Kevin F. Coppinger** said.

"The Hampden County Sheriff's Office enthusiastically works to make sure both incarcerated individuals and Section 35 clients in our care and custody who want to vote have the opportunity to do so, not only in the 2020 Presidential election, but all elections," said **Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi**. "We work diligently to educate those in our care on the voting process, we hand out and post multilingual fliers that lay out eligibility requirements for registering, we assist in the process for requesting an absentee ballot and we ensure ballots are received on time to be counted. I wholeheartedly believe in the right to vote for any and all eligible individuals and am proud of the work we do every day to make sure those that wish to have their voices heard have the ability to do so."

"In addition to working to help the men in our care and custody improve their overall health, staff at the HSO also work to make sure that our men are able to exercise their right to vote, if they so choose," said **Hampshire County Sheriff Patrick J. Cahillane**. "For decades, helping our men focus on the importance of full participation in their communities, and reminding them of their right and responsibility to vote, has been fundamental to the culture of the HSO. We believe that voting is an investment in community and family. We believe that the men in our care have a better chance of success if they feel invested – in their families, in their communities, in themselves. When I say that we embrace everyone's respect and dignity, and promote a caring environment, that includes providing full voting access to our men who are eligible. And this year is no different."

"I am committed to offering any and all assistance that we have at our disposal to ensure that the sanctity of voting is protected within our facilities, throughout the Commonwealth and across this country," said **Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins**. "The ability to cast one's ballot in a safe, secure and uncomplicated fashion is one of the greatest hallmarks of American culture and one of the bedrocks of any healthy, vibrant and civilized society."

The AG's Office has also [created and will distribute a flyer](#) with information about voting rights for eligible incarcerated individuals in Massachusetts. The AG's Office will distribute these flyers widely to ensure incarcerated individuals and those who have the closest contact with them have this vital information. The flyer will be sent to partners in the criminal justice system, including sheriffs' offices, defense attorneys, social workers and civil rights

organizations. A statewide coalition of organizations, including Emancipation Initiative, Common Cause Massachusetts, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, Prisoners Legal Services, the ACLU of Massachusetts and Healing Our Lands, Inc, has been working to protect and promote access to the ballot for eligible incarcerated voters, as well. They have volunteers on the county level who help ensure eligible voters have access to voting materials and have championed statewide reform.

“The League of Women Voters applauds the partnership between the Massachusetts Attorney General’s office and the Massachusetts Sheriffs’ Association to ensure that all eligible voters who are incarcerated have access to the ballot box for the November election,” said **Pattye Comfort, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts**. “Too often we forget that many of the people being held in jails have not been convicted. The League is proud to support these efforts to ensure that all eligible voters can cast their ballots in the upcoming election.”

“Everyone who has the right to vote on paper must have the ability to exercise that right in practice,” said **Kristina Mensik, Assistant Director of Common Cause Massachusetts**. “Those in state custody depend on the state – or often, volunteers like those in the [Election Protection Behind Bars Coalition](#) – to provide timely information on their rights, voting materials, candidate information, and deadlines. Especially in a year when volunteers have limited access to prisons and jails, voters behind the wall will need the leadership of the Attorney General’s Office and Sheriffs’ Association to be included in our elections, as is their right.”

“It is of paramount importance that the Commonwealth do all it can to ensure that access to the ballot box is meaningful and actual,” said **Elizabeth Matos, Executive Director of Prisoners’ Legal Services**. “Many individuals who are incarcerated, a population that is disproportionately Black, Brown, and working class, retain the right to vote. If that right is not actually afforded then it is, in fact, being denied. Defending basic democratic principles demands that we work together to ensure that everyone who is eligible to vote has ready access and that we do not treat eligible voters who happen to be incarcerated differently than other Massachusetts citizens.”

“In Massachusetts, people who are in custody can vote unless they are incarcerated on a felony conviction,” said **Carol Rose, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts**. “To make this right meaningful, we need to ensure that incarcerated people are given the information and materials they need to request and return ballots in time for them to be counted. All eligible voters—incarcerated or not—should be able to cast their ballots safely and conveniently.”

Incarcerated individuals can vote if they are a U.S. citizen, a Massachusetts resident, at least 18 years old, not disqualified by law and not currently incarcerated for a felony conviction. This means if an individual is in pre-trial detention, serving time on a misdemeanor, or civilly committed, they can register and vote in Massachusetts so long as they are otherwise qualified to vote.

The [AG's flyer](#) includes information about how to vote if you are incarcerated and lists important voting deadlines. Specifically, if you are incarcerated and eligible to vote, you do not need to be registered and can vote by absentee ballot as a “specially qualified voter.” The flyer encourages eligible incarcerated people to apply for an absentee ballot as soon as possible before the deadline and to send in their ballots early.

Absentee ballots can be obtained by submitting an absentee ballot request form or by requesting, in writing, an absentee ballot as a specially qualified voter from local election officials in the individual’s city or town of residence. If sending a written request, the individual must note they are incarcerated but not on a felony conviction. A voter’s residence is typically the city or town where they lived before incarceration (and not the community of the correctional facility).

The AG’s flyer with information for incarcerated voters [can be accessed here](#).

Earlier this month, Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin also [issued an election advisory regarding voting while incarcerated](#) to provide information regarding qualifications in addition to instructions for local election officials for processing applications.

AG Healey has made voter protection and election integrity a priority of her office. As part of her statewide voter protection initiative, AG Healey convened an internal task force to coordinate election protection related priorities across the office and with state attorneys general across the country. The AG’s Office also launched a new website with resources available for voters, including important dates, information about voting options, and how the AG’s Office is protecting your right to vote. For more information, visit mass.gov/protectthevote.

AG Healey is reminding voters that if someone verbally or physically threatens or harasses you while you are trying to vote, or interferes in some other way with your right to vote, you can call the **AG’s Civil Rights Division** for help at **617-963-2917**. If you need immediate assistance, dial 911 or contact your local police department.

Information regarding voting procedures in Massachusetts can be found on the Secretary of the Commonwealth’s Elections Division website at: www.sec.state.ma.us/ele.

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