

Nearly 1 million ballots sent to Massachusetts voters

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State House News Service

The secretary of state's office has already mailed out almost 950,000 ballots in advance of the Sept. 1 primary election, representing nearly a quarter of the state's 4.5 million registered voters.

The estimate of ballots mailed so far comes as the United States Postal Service faces increased scrutiny over whether it will be able to deliver mail-in ballots on time for local clerks to count them. USPS officials set off an uproar in late July when they warned states that deadlines for requesting and casting mail-in ballots are incongruous with the Postal Services' delivery standard.

But on Tuesday, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy issued a statement saying that he would suspend operational initiatives "that have been raised as areas of concern as the nation prepares to hold an election in the midst of a devastating pandemic" until after the election, to avoid the appearance of effects on electoral mail.

DeJoy also announced the expansion of a leadership task force on election mail. He said retail post office hours will not change, mail processing equipment and collection boxes "will remain where they are," no mail processing facilities will be closed, and overtime will be approved as needed.

Secretary of State William Galvin said about 149,000 ballots have been returned to local clerks and he expects mail-in voting will help boost participation while taking into account public health guidelines. The state's top election official said "a lot of people" who requested ballots were primarily

motivated by voting in the November general election, adding that more than a million people asked for ballots for the general election.

"This has been a very tedious effort to get all these ballots out. It was a very large mailing, and it had a great response, but it required a great deal of work at the local level to put these ballots out especially in a timely way," he said at a Tuesday press conference.

Attorney General Maura Healey on Tuesday announced a lawsuit to prevent the Trump administration from cutting back USPS operations as the elections approach. Galvin said his office has been in contact with Healey's, providing the attorney general "detailed information."

"The Postal Service has been able to provide ballot delivery even during wars. So I don't understand why this would be such a problem," Galvin said Tuesday. "This is a national issue. It needs to be addressed. My experience with the Trump administration through the census has been the only way to remedy bureaucratic problems that they create is to go to court. And I think that is the right answer here too."

In a Twitter thread posted to the social media website on Tuesday, Healey said the Trump administration is attempting to "slow down the Postal Service to rig the election."

"Like many of this Administration's policies, its changes to USPS are illegal. Modifications to the Postal Service with a nationwide impact on mail service must be submitted to the Postal Regulatory Commission," she wrote on Twitter. "Trump can't just wake up and unilaterally disrupt our mail system."

Gov. Charlie Baker said he was "uncomfortable" commenting on whether he would support potential litigation without knowing more information.

"Usually, the role we play, if they ask us to play one, is on

a sort of amicus basis to just give a discussion about what the implications of whatever the issue are, would be," he said at separate Tuesday press conference. "And that's our way usually of supporting those kinds of initiatives. I'm not aware that they've asked us for that. If they were to ask us we obviously would respond."

Out of concern for Postal Service delays, Galvin said his office made sure that the application and ballot mailings went out as early as possible. Additionally, the secretary of state's office advised localities to have drop boxes available at secure locations for voters to drop off their ballots.

"That gave voters the opportunity to make sure they return their ballot as quickly as possible as well and make sure that any disruption or delay in Postal Service would not have any effect on them," he said.

A law signed by Gov. Charlie Baker on July 6 directed the secretary of state to send out mail-in ballot applications by July 15. Galvin told reporters nearly a week before the date that would not meet the deadline set out in the legislation unless the Legislature provided funding.

Election reform and voting rights advocates and the secretary of state disagreed over permissible funding sources to mail out ballot applications and a group of seven nonwhite voters, Common Cause Massachusetts, and MassVOTE filed a lawsuit in an attempt to force the secretary to mail applications.

The governor's office agreed to advance funds included in a \$1.14 billion COVID-19 supplemental budget so Galvin's could move forward with mailing vote-by-mail applications.

The rush to solidify new vote-by-mail laws in the state came as a response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. Residents have three options for voting in the primary election, regular in-person voting, voting-by-mail, and a seven-day early in-person voting period that starts Saturday.

Voters who chose to vote-by-mail can track their ballots on the secretary of state's website, a measure that Galvin said would ensure residents know their ballots were cast.

Galvin said state and local officials "are going to great lengths" to make sure that voters who choose to head to the polls will be safe. Polling locations will observe social distancing guidelines, institute precautions for workers like PPEs and plexiglass guards, and space out voting booths.

"In fact, I would suggest to you that it'll be safer than going to many supermarkets," he said. "For those that wish to vote in person, who perhaps have delayed some final decisions on choices in the primary, and don't want to avail themselves of voting by mail, voting in person is an option."

Gov. Baker agrees to accept President Trump's extended unemployment benefits plan

After Congress failed to strike a deal to extend a federally funded \$600 weekly benefit, on August 8th President Trump signed an executive order extending unemployment benefits.

The amount of the extension plan which will be either \$300 or \$400 hinges upon the decision of each state's governor. The President's plan, each state is required to cover \$100 of the cost in order to receive the extra federal benefit dollars.

At a press conference at the State House on Tuesday, Gov. Baker said "We did submit a letter to the feds saying that we would apply to receive funds under that program. If this

program is there and it turns out to be the only thing that's there, I don't think Massachusetts should pass on that."

With 500,000 in Massachusetts without jobs due to the pandemic, it would be a boon considering federal benefits had ended in July leaving many without a livable income.

In order for Massachusetts to agree to the President's plan and come up with the \$100 per claimant, Gov. Baker said it would entail dipping into emergency aid provided in the CARES Act.

Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Utah are the first states to receive federal approval for the funding. and only South Dakota has declined.

Coronavirus pandemic renews debate over role of MCAS exam in Massachusetts

Katie Lannan

State House News Service

Supporters of legislation that would pause the use of MCAS tests as a graduation requirement and for school accountability measurements have another shot this week at trying to bring the Education Committee to their point of view.

Critics of the assessments have for years been filing bills that would impose a moratorium on "high-stakes" elements of MCAS exams, and the COVID-19 pandemic, by highlighting the importance of in-person learning, has reignited longstanding

debates over the use of standardized testing, how to close achievement gaps, the best ways to gauge students' proficiency, and the degree of state involvement in local school systems.

Sen. Jo Comerford and Rep. Jim Hawkins filed MCAS moratorium bills in June, each noting in the bill title that the proposal was a response "to the COVID-19 emergency." The bills are similar to legislation Rep. Marjorie Decker and Sen. Michael Rush filed at the start of this session in January 2019.

The Education Committee, chaired by Rep. Alice Peisch and Sen. Jason Lewis, effectively killed the Decker and Rush bills (H 431, S 328) earlier this year by including them in orders for further study. Comerford's bill (S 2814) met the same fate on Monday, with a study order of its own.

The version filed by Hawkins (H 4947) remains before the committee, where it arrived last week as committee members were collecting testimony on Comerford's bill. The committee plans to accept emailed comments on the Hawkins bill through 5 p.m. Wednesday.

More than 220 individuals and groups sent in written testimony on Comerford's bill by an Aug. 10 deadline. According to the committee's log of testimony received last week, more than 200 of the comments were in support.

Along with Hawkins and Comerford, five other legislators – Sens. Sal DiDomenico, Michael Brady and Pat Jehlen, and Reps. Denise Garlick and Carol Doherty – wrote in to back the bill.

Comerford, a Northampton Democrat, wrote in a letter to the committee that her bill gives lawmakers an opportunity to "meet the current crisis in education with necessary compassion and prioritization of time on learning" while also addressing persistent critiques "of what many believe is a failed test through setting up a robust process to usher in an exam worthy of 21st century ideals and educational

aspirations.”

Both the Comerford and Hawkins bills propose a moratorium on the use of MCAS tests as a graduation requirement, Hawkins through 2023 and Comerford through 2024. Each also creates a special commission to review the state’s school and district evaluation system.

The Massachusetts Teachers Association and the American Federation of Teachers of Massachusetts both back an MCAS moratorium, and dozens of teachers contacted the committee last week to voice their support.

“Currently, school districts across our Commonwealth are making the difficult, but important decision, of what school will look like for their students in the 2020-2021 school year, knowing that it is likely that all they will be receiving from the State is a levelally (sic) funded budget,” wrote Fitchburg City Council President Michael Kushmerek, a Democrat running for the House seat Rep. Stephan Hay is vacating. “While this burden is already significant for school committees and district leadership, the additional burden on teachers not only needing to adapt their teaching style to whatever model their school district chooses but additionally to ensure that each of their students is prepared for the MCAS is unacceptable and unrealistic.”

Groups opposing the bill include the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, Education Reform Now Advocacy, Mass. Parents United and the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

“A moratorium on MCAS testing, of any length of time, even one year, is bad for students, particularly our most disadvantaged, and the Chamber urges you oppose it,” Greater Boston Chamber President and CEO James Rooney wrote. “Forced school closures from the COVID-19 pandemic have only intensified the need to objectively measure how much students are learning to determine whether they are

meeting expectations or need extra support to stay on track.”

Rooney said the educational impact of the COVID-19 crisis can’t be fully quantified without “comparable and consistent” data from standardized tests.

Ed Lambert of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education said testing performance “during this period should be looked at within the unique context of the times,” but that it would be “absolutely unacceptable to deprive parents and taxpayers of essential information about school and district performance.”

This spring, after schools were abruptly forced to transition to remote learning as COVID-19 cases mounted in Massachusetts, state officials waived the MCAS testing requirement for 2020.

Liam Kerr wrote in the Education Reform Now testimony that officials “acted correctly” in doing so.

“High standards paired with assessments have served the Commonwealth well, propelling us from the middle of the pack to the nation’s leader in education outcomes,” Kerr wrote. “While much work remains to close learning gaps, the MCAS is an invaluable component of that work.”

Hawkins, in a weekend Facebook post, wrote that the Education Committee received an “avalanche” of testimony on Comerford’s bill, and said the same was needed for his.

“Both bills received immediate and profound support within both chambers and from our constituents when shared via social media platforms,” the Attleboro Democrat said in an Aug. 4 letter to Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley, signed by 32 other lawmakers. “There are very few with a true understanding of the implications who believe we should continue with MCAS during this pandemic. We implore you to respect the social/emotional needs of our students and decide swiftly and judiciously to cancel MCAS now.”

Little People's College in Acushnet holds socially distant pre-kindergarten graduation

On Thursday, August 13th Little People's College in Acushnet held a socially distant pre-kindergarten graduation. Although it wasn't our typical LPC graduation that we pride ourselves upon every year, we were happy to recognize the children's achievements and we wish them the best in kindergarten.

Attached is a photo of two of our graduates Charlotte and Clementine Boyd.

New Bedford Election Commission reminds voters of statewide deadline for applications to vote by mail

Wednesday, August 26 is deadline. Ballots must be returned by Election Day, September 1.

The New Bedford Election Commission reminds voters that the statewide deadline for absentee ballots in the state primary election is Wednesday, August 26. Ballots must be received by

the Election Commission office by Election Day, Tuesday, September 1, either by mail or drop-off at the Election Commission office at City Hall, 133 William Street.

All Massachusetts voters registered by July 1 have received applications to vote by mail due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In order to vote by mail with an absentee ballot, voters must return the application to the Election Commission by August 26. Due to the high volume of requests to vote by mail, responding sooner will result in receiving an absentee ballot sooner.

Applications must be received by the Election Commission office by August 26. Ballots must be received by the Election Commission office by Election Day, September 1. Applications and ballots can be mailed, or can be returned to the Election Commission office in person. City Hall and the Election Commission office are open at reduced hours due to the pandemic: Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

All state primary kits mailed to voters will contain four items: a ballot; vote by mail instructions; an early ballot envelope (for the ballot); and an outer mailing envelope to return the completed ballot. If your primary kit does not include any of these items, please contact the Election Commission office at 508-979-1420.

Voters may also vote in person, as always. As usual, on Election Day, Tuesday, September 1, polls will be open in the City of New Bedford from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Additional safety requirements including the use of masks/face coverings and the observance of social distancing will be in place due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Voters may cast their votes for: Senator in Congress; Representative in Congress; Senator in General Court; Representatives in General Court for the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Thirteenth Bristol Districts; County Treasurer;

County Commissioner; Governor's Councillor; and Register of Probate.

Election Commission to suspend Notary Public and Passport services until September 14.

The Election Commission office is suspending Notary Public and Passport services until September 14 as staff attends to the election. The office is still open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and available for election services such as registrations, absentee/mail-in ballots, address changes, and other voting-related services.

Early Voting

The New Bedford Election Commission has also announced that Early Voting for the 2020 state primary election will be held at the New Bedford Main Library, 613 Pleasant Street, from Saturday August, 22 through Friday, August 28.

Any voter who wishes to cast their ballot in person prior to Election Day, September 1, may do so at the Main Library during the following hours:

- Saturday, August 22: 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Sunday, August 23: 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Monday, August 24: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, August 25: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, August 26: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Thursday, August 27: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Friday, August 28: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Any New Bedford resident who is uncertain about their voting status, designated polling location, or who has changed their address since the last election, or any other question should contact the Election Commission office at 508-979-1420.

New Bedford man sentenced to three and a half years for armed carjacking

A 23-year-old New Bedford man who committed an armed carjacking in the city of New Bedford last October was sentenced to serve up to three-and-a-half years in state prison last week, Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III announced.

Calixto Smith pleaded guilty last Wednesday in Fall River Superior Court to an indictment charging him with Carjacking While Armed.

On October 10, 2019, at around 11 pm, the male victim and his wife were driving in their Acura sedan. When the driver was stopped at a red light at the intersection of Cove Road and Orchard Street, this defendant forced his way into the rear seat of the vehicle.

The defendant immediately brandished a knife and told the victim to "get the f*ck out of the car." The victim pulled his vehicle into a gas station parking lot on Rockdale Avenue, at which point he and his wife exited the vehicle. The defendant then exited the rear seat of the vehicle, while the male victim quickly armed himself with a baseball bat. While all parties were outside the car, the male victim was able to chase the defendant off with the baseball bat.

The investigation into the incident lasted approximately two months before the defendant was eventually identified and apprehended.

Calixto Smith was arrested in 2018 for two counts of possession of crack cocaine with intent to distribute and conspiracy to violate drug laws.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Shawn Guilderson and the two to three-and-a-half year state prison sentence was imposed by Judge Thomas Perrino.

"This case is another example of lawlessness in our cities that cannot be tolerated," District Attorney Quinn said.

Fairhaven Police seek public's help in identifying mail thief

"Mail theft suspect. If you can help us identify this thief we would greatly appreciate it!

This image is from security footage taken on August 10, 2020 at approximately 12:23 pm in the area of Manhattan Avenue. If anyone else in the area has other footage or information, please contact Detective Guerreiro at 508-997-7421.

Other homes in the area of Sconticut Neck Road may be victims as she had mail in her hand when she approached this mailbox."
-Fairhaven Police Department.

Wareham man arrested for allegedly removing copper pipes from home

On Friday, August 14, at 3:55 p.m. Wareham Police received a report of a breaking and entering in progress at a home on Parker Drive. Officers Lorenzo Grosso and James White responded and observed an open window with a male in the house. Officer Grosso advised the male to come out; however, the male retreated to the back, but noticed Officer White in the rear yard. Officer Grosso then made his way through the open window after he saw the male heading toward the garage area of the home. Officer Grosso apprehended him as he was attempting to exit the garage door.

According to police, the house was unoccupied, and officers observed a pile of copper pipes in the hallway along with assorted tools. 33-year old Joshua Medeiros of East Wareham was arrested and charged with breaking and entering in the daytime with intent to commit a felony and vandalizing property.

Ocean State Job Lot donates masks, shields, and hand sanitizer to New Bedford

Police Department

"The COVID-19 pandemic is not over and we're fortunate to have community partners that know this too.

Chief Joseph Cordeiro stopped by Ocean State Job Lot recently to receive a generous donation of 1,600 protective KN95 masks, 3,000 surgical masks, 10 face shields, 20 gallons of hand sanitizer and 15 infrared non-contact thermometers from Team Leader Mike Reardon.

Keeping our officers and community safe is our #1 priority." - New Bedford Police Department.

Senator Warren pressures Facebook to silence climate change debate

In a letter sent to Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren appears to be pressuring Facebook into silencing debate on climate change on Facebook and to remove news organization Breitbart from Facebook News. In their response, Facebook didn't appear to budge.

Senator Warren wrote in the first two paragraphs:

"Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

We write to you about reports that Facebook has created fact-checking exemptions for people and organizations who spread disinformation about the climate crisis on its social media

platform. Your company has reportedly “decided to allow its staffers to overrule the climate scientists and make any climate disinformation ineligible for fact-checking by deeming it ‘opinion.’” But the climate crisis and environmental degradation are not matters of opinion.

They are existential threats that hurt communities and economies throughout the world – including and especially Black communities and other communities of color – and will continue to do so. It is imperative that your company reverse course and take immediate steps to combat the spread of climate disinformation on its social media platforms.”

Her full letter can be read below.

Facebook refuted Senator Warren’s claims:

“Our independent third-party fact-checking partners do review and rate climate misinformation. There has never been a prohibition against them doing so. In fact, we have a fact-checking partner specifically dedicated to reviewing science content, and many of the other partners in our network of over 70 global fact-checking partner organizations rate this content as well. As with all claims debunked by our partners, we reduce the distribution of posts rated “false” or “partly false” in News Feeds and apply a warning label on top of them on Facebook and Instagram so people understand that the content has been rated and what the ratings mean.”

Facebook went on to answer her questions and can be read below.

Senator Warren’s full letter

07.15.2020 Letter from Sens. Warren, Carper, Whitehouse, & Schatz to Mr. Zuckerberg

Facebook’s response

Facebook response