24 October 2017

General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Boston, MA 02133

Members of the Massachusetts General Court:

We write to you to express our support for Bills H.2091 and S.373, both entitled An Act automatically registering eligible voters and enhancing safeguards against fraud, and H.2080, entitled An Act relative to automatic voter registration.

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,900 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their quality of life and work and their civic engagement during their studies at MIT. We support all measures that increase student engagement in the political process, so we strongly support automatic voter registration.

It is well known that young adults (18 to 24 years old) are the least likely to be registered to vote. This is particularly pronounced in non-presidential elections, ‘midterms,’ and off-years. U.S. Census data shows that, nationwide, less than 54% of eligible voters 18 to 24 years of age were registered to vote in 2012 and that no more than 46% were registered in the years of any recent non-presidential elections. In contrast, over 75% of citizens age 65 years and older have been registered in every recent election year on record.

We urge you to explicitly allow all institutions of higher education in Massachusetts to participate in automatic voter registration, and we commend the petitioners of H.2080 for including institutions of higher education in their framework. Students at Massachusetts universities represent an important subset of the young adult population, and automatic registration when students enroll would greatly increase their ability to participate in local and state government during their studies.

These bills would, in essence, make voter registration an opt-out system in the Commonwealth, in contrast to the current opt-in system. Examples in other fields have made it clear that opt-out systems will see much greater participation than opt-in systems. For example, Germany, which uses an opt-in system for organ donor registration, has an organ donation consent rate of 12% among its population, while Austria, a country with a very similar culture and economic development, but which uses an opt-out system, has a consent rate of 99.98%.

We urge you to pass one of these bills and implement automatic voter registration. Automatic voter registration would substantially improve the ability of all of our citizens to participate in the government of the Commonwealth.

Best regards,

Daniel Curtis
MIT GSC External Affairs Development Chair
MIT Nuclear Science and Engineering

Brittany Huhmann
MIT GSC State Affairs Chair
MIT Civil and Environmental Engineering

And the MIT GSC External Affairs team