Statement on the Expansion of Vote by Mail and Early Voting Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 7,000 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their quality of life and civic engagement during their time at MIT. MITvote is a non-partisan student group that works to increase voter turnout and civic engagement on campus. Both of our groups support requiring that states allow for 15 days of early voting and no-excuse vote-by-mail as in Sec. 160003 of H.R. 6800, the HEROES Act.

Early voting is important for students, blue collar workers, historically disenfranchised minorities, and other people for whom it may be especially difficult to vote on Election Day. Students in particular may have classes or other scheduled activities during voting hours on Election Day, or they may have a polling location far from campus and cannot leave campus for long enough to vote. Early voting allows students who might otherwise be unable to visit the polls during the scheduled hours to cast their vote. Early voting is especially important during today’s pandemic; an extended early voting period allows people to cast their ballot when polls are less crowded and thus minimize contact and risk of infection.

No excuse vote-by-mail is also an especially important reform during the pandemic as it allows voters to participate at home, thereby reducing the health risk to themselves and poll workers. These measures will help maintain participation in our democratic process despite the current crisis. Beyond the COVID-19 crisis, vote-by-mail makes voting more accessible to students and other groups who have difficulty getting to a polling location or who are occupied by other essential activities such as coursework, research, employment, or childcare. No-excuse vote by mail is an important step in the right direction not only for today’s crisis but also to expand voting access for years to come.

If you would like to know more about student voting or would like to discuss additional methods of making the ballot box more accessible to students, please reach out to the GSC at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu or MITvote at vote-exec@mit.edu.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council. May 2020.