Joint Statement Endorsing VOTES Act

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 measures in the VOTES Act (H.805/S.459) that will expand access to the ballot box for the university student community across Massachusetts.

Specifically, we support the following key measures to expand voting access for university students:

1. **Permanently implement expanded early voting periods.** Early voting is important for busy students whom it may be especially difficult to vote on Election Day. Students 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 busy students who might otherwise be unable to visit the polls during the scheduled hours to cast their vote. Early voting remains particularly important during the ongoing 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.

2. **Permanently implement no excuse vote-by-mail.** 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 also an especially important reform to maintain during the ongoing pandemic as it allows voters to participate at home, thereby reducing the health risk to themselves and poll workers.

3. **Implement same-day voter registration (SDR).** SDR is important to students, as youth voter participation is the lowest of any age demographic (In 2016 only 56.8% of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 were registered to vote compared to 77.3% in the 65 to 74 demographic). These low participation rates would be ameliorated by SDR, which is strongly correlated with an increase in youth voter registration and turnout, without changing the electorate’s partisan balance. Lack of SDR is a serious deterrent to student voting, as during its voter outreach efforts on Election Day 2018, MITvote encountered dozens of students who approached the organization seeking to register and vote on Election Day but who had to be turned away due to a lack of SDR in MA. By dramatically increasing the ease of registering to vote in MA, SDR would facilitate increased student voter participation.

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 graduate student council at gsc-eab-state@mit.edu or MITvote at vote-exec@mit.edu.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council and by MITvote. [April 2021]