



Boston wants to explore options for same-day voter registration

Changes would need a home-rule petition

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City Councilor Josh Zakim on Boston allowing same-day registration at the polls: “I don’t see how there could be much significant cost to this.”

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Boston city councilors want to explore ways to make it easier for residents to vote, including allowing them to register on Election Day, as [other states have done](#).

Following a court decision [last month](#), Massachusetts is under pressure to eliminate its requirement for residents to be registered 20 days ahead of time. The state is appealing.

But Josh Zakim and many of his council colleagues wonder whether Boston can make such moves on its own sooner than, and regardless of what, the courts decide at the statewide level.

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“Voting is our most fundamental right,” Zakim said. “We should be making it as easy as possible for those that have the right to vote to exercise that right.”

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Research shows that same-day registration, allowed in more than a dozen states, in some cases for

decades, can bolster democracy by motivating voters to go to the polls.

Some Massachusetts officials have voiced concerns about the financial [costs](#) of such a change, pointing to staffing and technology needs. But election officials in other states, including Connecticut and Vermont, have said they pulled it off without allocating significantly more resources, and experts say it can decrease certain election-related spending.

“There’s nothing more important than the right to vote,” Zakim said. “I certainly want to make sure we provide the proper resources. But I don’t see how there could be much significant cost to this.”

He said any voting-related changes in Boston would require a home-rule petition, meaning it would need approval from not only the council and the mayor, but also the state Legislature and the governor.

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Councilor Tito Jackson said that even if same-day registration increases costs for the city, it would be money well spent.

“Yes, there is a price tag to democracy, but it’s absolutely worth it,” said Jackson, who is running for mayor.

Jackson said that when he was in college in New Hampshire he registered and voted on Election Day, thanks to that state’s same-day registration policy.

In Boston, “with a city that has so many college students and people who move here, it’s important that their voices are heard, as well,” he said.

Zakim said he wants to explore having the city automatically register residents to vote when they complete other routine municipal transactions, such as registering for Boston Public Schools or for a parking permit. The current setup requires residents to actively opt-in to register to vote, he said.

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Zakim recently filed an [order](#), backed by 11 of the 13 councilors, to hold a hearing on this issue. He said he expects the council’s Special Committee on Civil Rights, which he chairs, will schedule the hearing for early fall.

The order calls for inviting officials from key groups, including the city’s Elections Department and MassVOTE, a nonprofit that registers people to vote and is one of three organizations suing the state over its 20-day registration deadline.

City Hall spokeswoman Nicole Caravella said Mayor Martin J. Walsh “supports improving access to the ballot box, and he looks forward to reviewing the specifics of this proposal.”

Zakim said that in other parts of the country some officials are attempting to make it harder for people to vote.

He added, “We’re still way behind a lot of other states” in terms of making it as easy as possible to vote. “But, we still have a chance to be a leader in this.”

“

‘There’s nothing more important than the right to vote’

Josh Zakim, Boston city councilor

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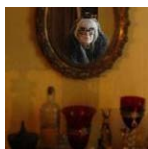
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