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State's top election official offers Legislature a plan for same-day voter registration



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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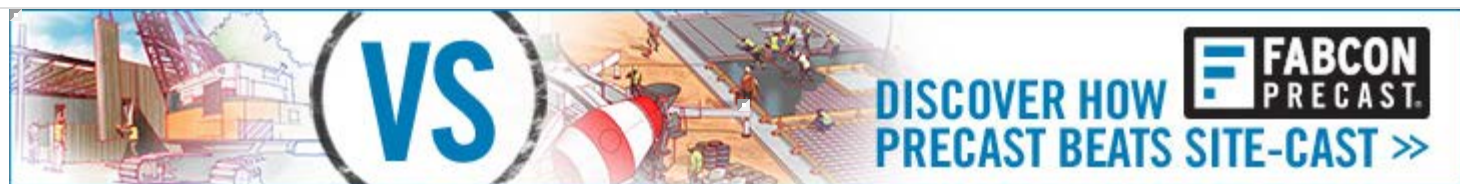
Massachusetts' top election official unveiled a proposal on Thursday to allow residents to register to vote on Election Day, as he faces a mix of public, legal, and political pressure to eliminate the state's requirement for residents to register at least 20 days in advance.

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin said he has always supported the basic notion of so-

called same-day or Election Day voter registration, which [research shows](#) can bolster democracy by motivating voters to go to the polls.

But he has worried that making the switch would burden local election officials with added costs as well as technical and logistical challenges.

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Now, however, Galvin says he has drafted a proposal that — unlike previous bills aimed at bringing same-day registration to the state — would address those concerns, and he's urging state lawmakers to approve his pitch.

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“We’ve heard advocates for a long time talking about the concept, but they didn’t have the details of how this would work,” Galvin said. “That’s what we’ve done here, we’ve figured out the details.”

Galvin and other state leaders have been under pressure to eliminate Massachusetts’ 20-day registration deadline. In the fall of 2016, several advocacy groups [sued](#) the state, and in July a judge [ruled](#) the deadline was unconstitutional.

One month later, city councilors in Boston [began a process](#) to explore whether the city could adopt same-day registration on its own sooner than, and regardless of, whatever happens at the state level.

That push was led by City Councilor Josh Zakim, who in late November [announced](#) he will run against Galvin for secretary of the Commonwealth in this year’s Democratic primary. Zakim, as a central point of his campaign, has [stressed](#) that he would do more to improve voter access and turnout, including by

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working to bring same-day registration to Massachusetts.

The state is appealing the court ruling, and Galvin said he still does not agree with the judge's decision, but he said the proposal he announced Thursday was not a result of Zakim's challenge.

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Zakim was less certain.

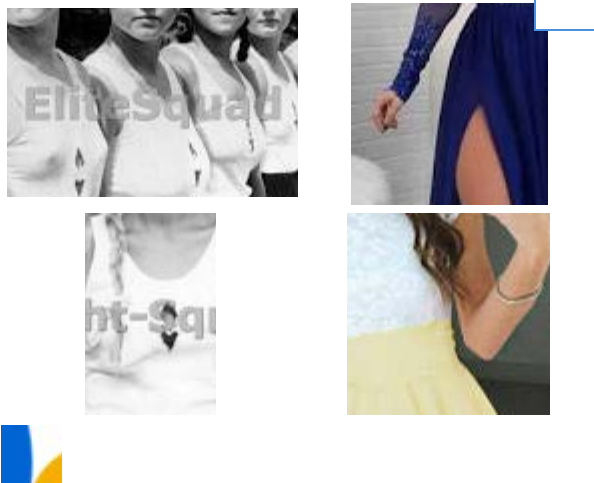
"The timing is very interesting," he said. "This is something I've been talking about since the beginning of this campaign and it's something that's resonated with voters."

"I think it's good to see that the secretary after several decades has finally come around on this issue. It's long overdue," he added.

Galvin said he has presented the proposal to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Election Laws and is hopeful lawmakers will pass it this summer.

The proposal would put same-day registration in effect starting in 2019, which Galvin said would provide time for local officials to adopt and fine-tune the change before the 2020 presidential election.

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To register on Election Day, residents would have to prove their identity and residency in person, as in other states with same-day registration.

The practice has been allowed in more than a dozen states, in some cases for decades and without the

need for special technology. And it is not always a costly change.

But Galvin said more funding and special technology would be needed to ensure same-day registration is rolled out smoothly, accurately, and securely.

The proposal calls for having statewide electronic poll books at each polling location. Other states use such books, which would connect to the state's database of voters and can verify in real time that the person isn't registered and hasn't already voted.

There would be a startup cost to that, and Galvin said cities and towns would need additional funding for extra staffing on Election Day.

The proposal does not specify how much funding should be provided. Galvin said switching to same-day registration can reduce costs in some areas. For example, it can slash the number of provisional ballots, used if questions about a voter's eligibility arise.

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