

# SENATE . . . . . No. 2650

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Senate, August 6, 2018 -- Message from His Excellency the Governor (pursuant to Article LVI, as amended by Article XC, Section 3 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) returning with recommendation of amendment the engrossed Bill to promote and enhance civic engagement (see Senate, No. 2631).

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## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts



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, MA

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*August 3, 2018*

To the Honorable Senate,

Pursuant to Article LVI, as amended by Article XC, Section 3 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I am returning to you for amendment Senate Bill No. 2631, "An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement."

I am pleased that just this past June, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to approve a revision of the History and Social Sciences curriculum framework, improving the impact of civics education across multiple grade levels and subject areas. That framework, along with anticipated assessment and measurement of student access to quality civics instruction, will support the general objective of this legislation.

This proposal complements the Board's recent action by establishing a high school voter challenge program to encourage early registration in municipal and state elections, including primary elections. While I welcome efforts to facilitate student participation in our electoral processes, we must make certain that such efforts are conducted in our public schools on a non-partisan basis.

This bill also introduces new strategies to strengthen and standardize civics education in our public schools. An informed citizenry, fully exposed to a wide variety of ideas, is critical to our democracy. Accordingly, we must be thoughtful as to how we approach the instruction of

civics, always ensuring in our classrooms that differing points of view are afforded impartial consideration. When opposing positions are raised, our students should be expected to engage in a civil discourse that is both appropriate and respectful. Furthermore, while we want to encourage the development of critical reasoning skills, we would never want students to feel forced to engage in student-led civic projects in the public sphere that advance positions contrary to their personal convictions. Schools, therefore, must make alternative opportunities readily available.

To clarify this bill and safeguard the opportunity for balanced civil discourse in our public schools, I recommend that Senate Bill No. 2631 be amended in the following manner:

(i) Amend Section 2 of the bill by inserting in the first sentence of subsection (a) of proposed section 26A, after the words “establish a”, the following word:- “non-partisan”.

(ii) Amend Section 4 of the bill by striking out in its entirety subsection (c) of proposed section 2 and inserting in place thereof the following subsection:-

(c) Each public school serving students in the eighth grade and each public high school shall provide all students with the opportunity to participate in not less than 1 student-led, non-partisan civics project for each student; provided, however, that each such project shall be consistent with the history and social science curriculum frameworks adopted by the board pursuant to section 1E of chapter 69 and with structured learning time requirements as required under regulations promulgated by the board of elementary and secondary education. Civics projects may be individual, small group or class wide, and designed to promote a student’s ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state and local policies, including issues that may impact the student’s school or community. Students choosing not to participate in any particular project shall be offered alternative opportunities to develop the civic abilities described in this section.

Thank you for your prompt consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles D. Baker,  
*Governor*