



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Representative Smola Supports Bill to Promote Civics Education in Massachusetts Schools

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) is supporting legislation to help students develop strong citizenship skills by expanding civics education in Massachusetts’ public schools. House Bill 4545, An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement, was approved by the House of Representatives on a 151-0 vote on May 30.

Representative Smola noted that state law already requires elementary and high school students to receive instruction in American history and civics. This includes learning about the Constitutions of the United States and Massachusetts; the Declaration of Independence; the Bill of Rights; local history and government; proper flag display and etiquette; and the importance of participating in the electoral process.

Under the House proposal, several new civics-related topics would be added to the curriculum, with students learning about the differences between the local, state and federal governments; the roles and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy; how to analyze and evaluate written and digital media pertaining to history and civics; and community diversity and historical trends in voter registration and civic participation relative to disenfranchised voter populations.

House Bill 4545 also requires all public middle and high school students to be given the opportunity to participate in a civics project, including individual, small group, and class projects. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) will adopt guidelines to support school districts with the implementation of civics projects, including developing regional or statewide civics competitions to help engage students.

The bill also authorizes school committees to designate student outreach coordinators to work with student advisory committees and keep them informed of the local school committee's agenda. In addition, the bill requires the Secretary of State to work with the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to promote an annual high school voter challenge to assist students with registering or pre-registering to vote.

To help fund some of the new initiatives being proposed in the bill, including a Commonwealth Civics Challenge for eighth grade students, House Bill 4545 authorizes the creation of a Civics Project Trust Fund. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will administer this fund, which will also be used to support professional development training for teachers.

Representative Smola noted that the House bill complements the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) ongoing efforts to modify the 2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework by placing a greater emphasis on civics. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) is scheduled to vote on the proposed revisions to the framework on June 26.

The Senate passed its own version of the civics education bill on March 22. The House and Senate will now attempt to reconcile the differences between the two bills and reach agreement on a final bill that can be sent to Governor Charlie Baker for his signature.

For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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