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May 2, 2018

Representative William C. Galvin
Chair, House Committee on Rules
State House, Room 166
Boston, MA 02133

Re: S.2375, An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement

Dear Chair Galvin ,

I write as President of the Boston Bar Association (BBA), a volunteer organization of nearly 13,000 members drawn from private practice, corporations, government agencies, legal-aid organizations, the courts, and law schools. Our mission is to advance the highest standards of excellence for the legal profession, facilitate access to justice, serve the community at large and promote diversity and inclusion. I write to express our support for S.2375, *An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement*.

Across the country, recent research has consistently documented the alarming lack of understanding Americans have about the practices and processes of the government and its institutions. For example, one recent survey revealed that two-thirds of Americans cannot name all three branches of the government and one in five believe that a 5-4 Supreme Court decision is returned to Congress for reconsideration.

As an association of attorneys, we understand just how crucial it is that students are instilled with an understanding of our government and how it functions, at the federal, state, and local level. Our legal institutions, a critical underpinning of our democracy, can only function when individuals that are interacting with the system have an understanding of, and commitment to, the rule of law.

Alarming, the judiciary's unique role in our state and federal governments may be especially vulnerable when the public lacks knowledge of key concepts like the role of checks and balances, separation of powers, and judicial review. Indeed, even retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter noted in 2009 that the biggest threat to judicial independence was "a public majority unaware of the basic shape of government." A lack of appreciation among the citizenry of the function of the courts in our cherished system of checks and balances can make them susceptible to partisan attacks

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that undermine faith in the judiciary as the third co-equal branch of government.

The provision of civics education in public schools will ensure the next generation understands the role of all parts and functions of the government, sustaining confidence in the key institutions of a constitutional democracy, including the courts, the jury, and other critical aspects of our justice system.

We stand ready, as an organization, to offer our expertise and our perspective to assist in the implementation of the law, and the development of an enhanced civics curriculum. Just as Massachusetts has been shown time and again to be a leader in elementary and secondary education, this bill offers us the opportunity to lead on civics education as well. As such, we urge you to support this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Mark Smith
President

cc:

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