



**SIERRA
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MASSACHUSETTS
CHAPTER

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June 11, 2013

The Honorable Barry Finegold
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Election Laws
State House, Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable James Murphy
House Chair, Joint Committee on Election Laws
State House, Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony of the MA Sierra Club in Regards to H.591/H.647

Dear Chairman Finegold, Chairman Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer our comments on House Bills **H.591/H.647**. These bills would have the effect of undoing the state's progress in moving towards the goal of electing the President of the United States by popular vote. The Sierra Club would like to express our strong support in opposition to these two bills.

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest non-profit, non-partisan organization environmental organization in the country. With over a forty year history in this chapter, the Massachusetts Sierra Club represents about 22,000 members throughout the state and nearly one million nationwide. We fight for clean air, clean water, the preservation of the Commonwealth's most precious natural spaces, and healthy, vibrant communities.

The Electoral College method of electing the president is an 18th-century outdated anachronism that enables campaigns to almost completely ignore most states. It allows a shift of a handful of votes in one or two states like Ohio or Florida to decide the presidency. Constitutional amendments to abolish the Electoral College and institute direct election of the president have been filed in the US Congress and Senate.

In a multi-candidate race where candidates have strong regional appeal, as in 1824, it is quite possible that a candidate who collects the most votes on a nation-wide basis will not win the electoral vote. In a two-candidate race, that is less likely to occur. But it did occur in the Hayes/Tilden election of 1876 and the Harrison/Cleveland election of 1888 due to the statistical disparity between vote totals in individual State elections and the national vote totals. This also occurred in the 2000 presidential election, where George W. Bush received fewer popular votes than Albert Gore Jr., but received a majority of electoral votes.¹ And in 2004, if a mere 60,000 swing voters in Ohio had changed their minds and voted for John Kerry, he would have won the presidency while losing the national popular vote by 3 million ballots.²

Because this proposed legislation would sunset or repeal efforts to institute this democratic process, the Sierra Club opposes these bills. We urge the members of this committee to report both of these bills unfavorably, thus allowing our current laws to remain in force without modification.

Respectfully,



Ryan Black
Director
Massachusetts Sierra Club

¹ US Federal Register Archives, NARA/Electoral College, website <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/faq.html>

² Sierra Magazine, 10 Steps to Better Elections, Steven Hill, May 2005