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SPRING 2013 ELECTION REFORM HIGHLIGHTS

Two key bills have passed the Illinois General Assembly and are awaiting the governor's signature. Once they are law, Illinois voters will enjoy a host of new election participation rights and opportunities under HB 2418 and HB 226.

Online Registration: In one of the most exciting changes to Illinois law, the state will offer an online voter registration system by July 1, 2014 (Sen. Don Harmon). Anyone who has a verifiable signature on file with the Illinois Secretary of State for their driver's license or state ID card will be able to register to vote online. Moreover, they will be allowed to request a mail ballot. Plus, an online system should ultimately cut costs and reduce registration errors.

Online Mail Ballot Requests: For the first time, election authorities around the state will be authorized to fulfill online mail ballots requests. (Illinois converted to no-excuse mail balloting in 2010.) Online requests will make voting by mail available to more voters and should be in place for the March 18, 2014 gubernatorial primary.

Electoral Board Reform: In a major step toward ballot access reform, local school electoral boards were eliminated (Sen. Daniel Biss, Rep. Bob Martwick). School board petitions will now be filed with county clerks, who will also hear all challenges in those races. In suburban Cook County, 149 electoral boards were eliminated. Abuses and conflicts of interest on local electoral boards were detailed in a *Chicago Tribune* series earlier this year.

Provisional Ballot Reforms: Voters will benefit from two changes to the law regarding provisional ballots. If a ballot is cast in the wrong *precinct* but is in the correct *district*, it will count—down to the municipal level. Plus, provisional voters whose registration is in question will have seven days to provide validating information, rather than just two days.

Grace Period Ballot Availability: Under this provision of 2418, voters who register during the grace period must be allowed to vote immediately (rather than wait for an absentee ballot in the mail) if the ballot in their district has been finalized. This will prevent voters from getting caught in a narrow window of time to receive and mail their ballot, possibly missing the postmark deadline.

17-year-old Suffrage: Under HB 226 (Sen. Terry Link, Rep. Carol Sente) voters who will turn 18 by a general election will now be allowed to vote in the preceding primary. That means that voters who will turn 18 by November 4, 2014 can register to vote and take part in the March 18, 2014 gubernatorial primary.