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## [News](#)

# Somerville's delegation wants to neuter Electoral College

By S.H. Bagley

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Somerville -

Somerville's delegation in the state House of Representatives wants to take the power away from the Electoral College.

Two of Somerville's delegation, state Rep. Carl Sciortino and state Sen. Pat Jehlen, co-sponsored the National Popular Vote Bill, which would legally bind the Massachusetts members of the Electoral College vote for the presidential and vice presidential candidates the national popular vote selected, rather than the candidates the state's popular vote selected.

"[This bill] gets us one step closer to one person, one vote," Sciortino said. The bill, if passed, would not take effect in time to have an impact on the November elections.

The Electoral College is a group of Democrats and Republicans nominated at each party's state convention. Each state gets one elector for each state representative in the United States Congress. They cast their votes for presidential and vice presidential candidates at ceremonies in their own states. They are supposed to vote in accordance with the way their states voted, but they are not legally bound to do so.

The Popular Vote Bill is a compact between states, and would only take effect if enough states to equal 270 electoral votes sign on (270 being the majority of electoral votes cast nationwide). The Electoral College would still exist, since the only way to get rid of that system would be to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Jehlen, who said she would vote for the bill when it came before the state Senate, said her constituents had largely supported the bill, and were not concerned about the change in electoral policy. "People care less about how their electors vote," Jehlen said. "We're becoming less regional."

The bill passed the House July 9 by an overwhelming majority of 116-37. All three of Somerville's members of the House of Representatives — Sciortino, Denise Provost and Tim Toomey — voted in favor of the bill.

Sciortino said he voted in favor of the bill because it guarantees individual votes count. "There would never be another scenario where a candidate would win the popular vote but lose the election," Sciortino said.

Provost voted in favor of the bill, but she had to be convinced. "I was persuaded [direct representation] was a more fair system," Provost said.

But, Provost said, changing the way elections are decided will not necessarily create a perfect system. "[Direct representation] is capable of producing paradoxical results, just like the electoral system," Provost said.

One key benefit to signing on to the national compact would be the boost in voter confidence, Provost said. It would create "a system in which the public has confidence, and gives them evidence their votes count," she said.

"There's been a loss of faith in the electoral system on the national level, at least as a result of the 2000 and to some extent the 2004 election. This is part of restoring confidence in the process," she said.

Ward 7 Alderman Bob Trane, running for Carl Sciortino's seat in the House of Representatives this year, said the Electoral College was best left in the past. "I think the Electoral College is a product of a bygone era," Trane said.

Getting rid of it would bring more people out to vote, Trane said. "More people would come out and vote if they knew their vote counted."

The bill might have traction in the Senate. Jason Marshall, state Sen. Anthony Galluccio's press representative, said Galluccio planned to vote in support of the amendment.

Jehlen said she also planned to sign it. "Most of the communications from my constituents have been favorable," she said. "Most, but not all."

Helen Corrigan, former chairman of the Somerville Democratic Committee, served as a member of the Electoral College for the 2004 election. When asked about whether she thought the bill was a good idea, Corrigan said she had mixed feelings. "It sounds like a good idea, but I haven't made up my mind about it," Corrigan said.

#### How it works

Since only an amendment to our Constitution could wipe out the Electoral College, The Popular Vote Bill would prescribe how a majority of the Electoral College members could vote. Say if Democrat X wins the popular vote in Massachusetts, but Republican Y wins the

Corrigan said the Electoral College was created to give each state a fair amount of power in choosing the president. The college seats one member, from each state, for each member of that state's Congressional delegation. Massachusetts, with 10 members of the House of Representatives and two senators, seats 12 people to the Electoral College.

Corrigan did not think other states would join Massachusetts in passing the bill. "We're looked on as a liberal state, like we want to change everything," Corrigan said.

When Corrigan went to cast her vote, as one of two members of the Electoral College from Somerville, she was surprised by the degree of ceremony that went along with the process. She said the men who went were dressed in tuxedos and the women also dressed up. "Most of them were wearing something black," she said. "The day of, we went to a very nice lunch at the Parker House."

At the end of the day, Corrigan said, she got a check. "I think it was for \$3.60," she said. "Some people got more. I never cashed mine."

(A "Yes" vote is for the bill making Massachusetts a member of The Agreement among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote. A "No" vote is against the bill).

Rep. Denise Provost Yes/Yes

Rep. Carl Sciortino Yes/Yes

Rep. Timothy Toomey Yes/Yes

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popular vote, the proposed law would force all Massachusetts' electoral votes to vote Republican. The theory is, if 270 of 538 electoral votes are based upon the popular vote, the Republican winning the popular vote becomes our next president.

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