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June 22, 2017

Senator Anne M. Gobi  
Chairwoman, Joint Committee on Election Laws  
State House, Room 513 Boston, MA 02113

Representative John J. Mahoney Chairman, Joint Committee on Election Laws  
State House, Room 443 Boston, MA 02113

Honorable Chairpersons and Members of the Joint Committee on Election Laws:

Thank you for having this opportunity to submit public testimony in support of An Act restoring financial transparency in presidential elections. Thank you to Senator Michael Barrett for introducing Senate bill S.365.

There are a number of reasons we should pass this bill in Massachusetts and all Presidential or Vice-Presidential candidates should comply in 2020 and beyond.

1. **It's been common practice for 40 years:** For 40 years, presidents have voluntarily released their tax returns. That is not the case with the current president. Americans want transparency with the office of the Presidency and they deserve to know that the president is working for their best interests. Tax returns are an important piece of data to provide transparency and to ensure honest conduct. This needs to be the rule – not a voluntary act.
2. **The president should be held to the same ethical standards as the rest of the government employees:** The 14 guiding principles for every employee of the federal government includes one that states: “employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty”. While the federal government may not be able to enforce this rule on the president, the residents of Massachusetts should do our best to guarantee it for ourselves.
3. **The State of Massachusetts knows about the important relationship between representation and taxes – let's show once again that we are willing to stand up for fairness:** Presidents, including the current one, often propose tax code changes. It is only reasonable to expect that a President advocating a tax code overhaul should have to make public their taxes so that citizens can know how the changes would personally benefit the President. Posting the tax returns on the Massachusetts Secretary of State website would allow any resident (and any American) to view these returns and decide.
4. **This isn't a unique idea – it's a trend:** There are now at least 20 states considering similar bills. These states represent a mix of predominantly Republican, swing and Democratic states including: TN, IA, PA, OH, MI, MN, NM, OR, ME, IL, VA, CA, CT, HI, MA, MD, NJ, NY, RI and VT.
5. **It's a bipartisan issue:** A recent poll found that 73% of registered voters think that the President should release his taxes. And 64% of Republicans think that he should release his taxes. Legislators should work across the aisle in a bipartisan fashion to turn bipartisan issues like this one into actual legislation. This is an issue most Massachusetts residents believe in and is currently part of the Massachusetts Democratic Platform.
6. **Now is the time:** Even if the bill passed this year, it won't go into effect until 2019. We would like to see the law in place in time for 2020 elections.
7. **It's a procedural step:** Requiring a presidential candidate to submit his or her tax returns before being printed on the ballot is merely a procedural step. Let's pass this bill and make it a step they can't avoid.

I urge the Joint Committee on Election Laws to favorably report this bill out of committee for a vote this year on the floor of both the Senate and the House.

Sincerely,

**Cindy Friedman**  
Arlington