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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Shumlin Signs Into Law Automatic Voter Registration

MONTPELIER – With some governors working to make it harder for citizens to vote, Gov. Peter Shumlin today signed a law to make it easier. The bill (H.458), signed into law at Montpelier City Hall, automatically registers eligible Vermonters to vote when they apply for a state driver's license. President Obama has called for so-called automatic voter registration (AVR) laws to be adopted nationwide. Vermont is now the fourth state with such a law.

“While states across the country are making it harder for voters to get to the polls, Vermont is making it easier by moving forward with commonsense policies that remove unnecessary barriers and increase participation in our democracy,” said Gov. Shumlin. “I would like to thank Secretary Condos who has long championed important electoral reforms to help more Vermonters exercise this fundamental right to vote.”

“As Vermont's Secretary of State, I believe voting is a sacred right – one we must protect and encourage by removing unnecessary barriers. Automatic Voter Registration saves time and money, increases the accuracy of our statewide voter checklist, curbs the potential for fraud, and protects the integrity of our elections,” said Secretary Condos. “AVR saves time and money, increases the accuracy of our statewide voter checklist, curbs the potential for fraud, and protects the integrity of our elections.”

H.458 passed through the Vermont Legislature with virtual unanimous support. It will streamline voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with a system that identifies eligible Vermonters and automatically sends their information to the town or city clerk for addition to the checklist, unless they opt out.

Earlier this year, as part of a broader push for electoral reforms, President Obama addressed the Illinois General Assembly to express support for automatic voter registration through driver license applications and encouraged states to lead in making the practice “the new norm across America.” Vermont joins Oregon, California, and West Virginia in adopting an AVR law.

Meanwhile, states across the country are being cited with the passage of laws that make it harder for their citizens to vote. Most notably a North Carolina law, which was upheld on Monday by a federal judge, peeled back a provision to allow same day voter registration, reduced the early-voting period, and enforced a voter identification requirement that critics are calling discriminatory and regressive.

Vermont continues to pave the way for greater democratic participation, just last year becoming the 14th state to allow same-day voter registration. It is estimated that automatic voter registration could add between 30,000 and 50,000 new voters within the first four years, strengthening Vermont's ranking as a state with among the highest registration rates in the country.

The law will go into effect July 1, 2017.

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