

**Massachusetts Democrats propose rule change for easier ballot access  
by Shira Schoenberg  
August 23rd, 2013**

The Massachusetts Democratic Party is considering a rule change that would make it easier for candidates to get on the party's primary ballot.

The proposed change would give candidates two chances, rather than one, to get support from 15 percent of delegates to the Democratic nominating convention.

Candy Glazer, a member of the state Democratic Party's rules committee and executive committee, said the rules committee is proposing the change "just to give people a little more of a chance."

A candidate has always needed 50 percent of the vote at the state Democratic convention in order to get the party's endorsement. There can be up to three rounds of voting. In the past, a candidate who did not get at least 15 percent of the vote on the first ballot was eliminated from participating in the party's primary. Under the proposed rules, a candidate who does not get 15 percent in the first ballot would have another chance in the second round of voting.

At its 2014 convention, which will be held June 13-14 in Worcester, the Democratic Party will nominate and endorse candidates for Congress, governor, lieutenant governor and other statewide offices. There are already four Democratic gubernatorial candidates, with others looking at getting into the race. The large number of candidates could make it harder to reach the 15 percent threshold.

"There's such a range of candidates, and with so many candidates running, it's just to keep it open," Glazer said.

The proposed rules will be voted on at a Democratic State Committee meeting in Worcester on Sept. 7.

Democratic Party Chairman John Walsh said he was on vacation and not at the rules committee meeting, and he has not yet taken a position on the proposed rules. He said the proposed change stemmed from a discussion that having a large number of candidates could make it difficult to get 15 percent. "I don't know whether it will be adopted or not," Walsh said.

At the 2012 Democratic convention, immigration attorney Marisa DeFranco tried to challenge Harvard Law School professor Elizabeth Warren in the U.S. Senate primary. DeFranco was denied a spot on the ballot when Warren received 95 percent of the vote. A party spokesman said at the time that it was the first time since the rules were implemented in 1982 that a candidate received enough votes to eliminate the need for primary. Though some DeFranco supporters were upset about the process, Glazer said DeFranco's name did not come up in the discussion about changing the rules. The proposed rule would not have changed the result in that case, since voting stops as soon as one candidate gets 50 percent of the vote.

DeFranco said she does not think the proposed rule change makes a difference. "It's sort of like trying to make the mafia more ethical," DeFranco said. "You're trying to make a process that's fundamentally undemocratic fair."

DeFranco said she thinks anybody who gets the required number of ballot signatures should be on the ballot – and they should not need to be approved at a party convention. She said the party should be able to vote on who to endorse, but not on who appears on the ballot. "I think parties have the right to have their preferred candidate, but they don't have a right to put barriers on the system that prevents the voters from choosing," DeFranco said.

Walsh said the 15 percent threshold has been in place for years and he would not like to see that changed. Walsh argued that the threshold means a candidate must talk face to face with activists on the ground. "The idea requires all candidates to work at a grassroots level and engage with organizers who do the caucuses and conventions," Walsh said. "It's an effort to build that strength."

Some Democrats see no problem with the existing rules. "I don't see the need for this 'second bite at the apple' rules change," said Matt Barron, chairman of the Chesterfield Democratic Town Committee. "If a statewide candidate has done their homework regarding effective outreach across the state in urban, suburban and rural parts of the Commonwealth, they should not have a problem getting 15 percent of the convention delegates on the first ballot."

*This article was published in on MassLive.com on August 23rd, 2013.*