

# HOUSE . . . . No. 1355.

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## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, BOSTON, May 23, 1898.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives:*

I return herewith to the House of Representatives, in which it originated, a bill entitled "An Act to reorganize the board of aldermen and common council of the city of Boston," with my objections thereto in writing.

This bill if enacted will effect a radical change in the constitution of the city council of the city of Boston. It does not provide for its acceptance either by the voters of the city or by their elected representatives. I do not find that its passage has been petitioned for either by the present city council or by any large number of citizens, interested in the good government of the city, and representing its intelligence and its business, professional and property interests.

The bill provides for a board of aldermen to consist of twenty-five members, each elected by the registered voters of one of the twenty-five wards of the city, and for a common council of fifty members, of whom the registered voters of each ward shall elect two. Except in the unimportant detail of numbers, the two branches are therefore absolutely identical in their constitution. Alderman and common councilman alike will represent solely a limited, local constituency, and are to continue in office or to be removed therefrom solely according to their success in meeting the desires, reasonable or otherwise, of a single ward. I do not think that this method of election will tend to call into the service

of the city men of large capacity and experience, capable of regarding the interests of the entire municipality as paramount to those of a restricted locality. The advantages which are claimed for the bicameral system of legislative bodies are due chiefly to the fact that the two chambers are either differently elected or represent different constituencies, so that they may be expected to approach the consideration of questions of public interest from different points of view. These advantages disappear in a system which provides for the absolute duplication of the two bodies except only in the number of their members. It is true that for several years the members of the Boston board of aldermen were elected by districts and not by vote of the city at large, but it is also true that these districts were at least double the size of those contemplated in the present bill, and that even with this advantage the results were so unsatisfactory that this method was very generally condemned and was finally abandoned.

Whatever influences have made the city council of Boston a body of less high purposes and wise efficiency than its citizens believe the council might become if constituted in a manner different from the present, would in my opinion be intensified rather than abated by the legislation contemplated in this bill. Instead of raising the standard of membership, and making more honorable the service in either branch, the operation of this bill would tend, I believe, to lower the one and to degrade the other. In the attempt to correct acknowledged evils it is better to make no change, rather than to adopt a change which bears no promise of improvement.

I feel confident that a better method than the one proposed can be devised to effect the improvement in the legislative branch of the government of the city of Boston which should be the constant effort of her citizens.

For these reasons I am unable to give my official approval to the bill.

ROGER WOLCOTT.



