**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 7‑5‑321 SO AS TO ALLOW AN ELECTOR TO HAVE CERTAIN PERSONAL IDENTIFYING INFORMATION DECLARED CONFIDENTIAL; BY ADDING SECTION 7‑17‑25 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT POST‑ELECTION AUDITS TO CORRECT OR VERIFY THE OUTCOME OF ALL ELECTIONS MUST BE COMPLETED BY THE COUNTY BOARDS OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS PRIOR TO CERTIFICATION OF THE ELECTION PURSUANT TO REGULATIONS PROMULGATED BY THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION AND THAT THESE REGULATIONS SHALL INCLUDE A PROVISION THAT AUDIT DATA AND REPORTS MUST BE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC; TO AMEND SECTION 5‑15‑100, RELATING TO THE POWERS AND DUTIES OF MUNICIPAL ELECTION COMMISSIONS, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT MANAGERS OF AN ELECTION SHALL CERTIFY THE RESULTS WITHIN TWO DAYS OF THE ELECTION; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑3‑20, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT ALL STATE ELECTION COMMISSION DIRECTIVES TO THE COUNTY BOARDS OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS MUST BE IN WRITING AND SENT TO BOTH THE DIRECTORS AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNTY BOARDS; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑3‑25, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO NONCOMPLIANT BOARDS OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT A COUNTY BOARD OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS MAY APPEAL TO THE FULL STATE ELECTION COMMISSION BY A DIRECTIVE FROM THE STAFF OF THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION MADE TO THE COUNTY BOARD; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑11‑15, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO THE FILING OF THE STATEMENT OF INTENTION OF CANDIDACY AND PARTY PLEDGE, SO AS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF SIGNED COPIES THAT MUST BE FILED WITH THE ELECTION COMMISSION FROM THREE TO ONE, AND TO MAKE CERTAIN CONFORMING TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑11‑80, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO THE FORM OF THE NOMINATING PETITION, SO AS TO PROVIDE FOR AN ALTERNATE PAPER SIZE FOR NOMINATING PETITIONS FOR CANDIDACY OR POLITICAL PARTY CERTIFICATION; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑13‑35, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO NOTICE OF GENERAL, MUNICIPAL, SPECIAL, AND PRIMARY ELECTIONS, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT IN THE EVENT AN ELECTION IS POSTPONED, THE ELECTION MUST BE HELD ON THE FIRST TUESDAY AFTER THE ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED ELECTION DAY; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑13‑190, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO SPECIAL ELECTIONS TO FILL VACANCIES, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT IN THE EVENT THE GOVERNOR DECLARES A STATE OF EMERGENCY COVERING AN ENTIRE JURISDICTION HOLDING AN ELECTION, THE ELECTION MUST BE POSTPONED AND HELD ON THE FOLLOWING TUESDAY AND TO PROVIDE AN EXCEPTION FOR STATEWIDE PRIMARIES OR GENERAL ELECTIONS UNLESS THE DECLARATION COVERS THE ENTIRE STATE; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑15‑420, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO THE RECEIPT, TABULATION AND REPORTING OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT ABSENTEE BALLOTS MAY NOT BE TABULATED UNTIL AFTER THE POLLS ARE CLOSED ON ELECTION DAY AND TO PROVIDE THAT ANYONE WHO PREMATURELY RELEASES INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC REGARDING THE TABULATION OF BALLOTS IN VIOLATION OF THIS SECTION IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR AND, UPON CONVICTION, MUST BE FINED UP TO ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS OR IMPRISONED NOT MORE THAN NINETY DAYS; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑17‑10, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO THE MEETING AND ORGANIZATION OF COUNTY BOARDS OF CANVASSERS, SO AS TO CHANGE THE MEETING TIME FOR THE COMMISSIONERS OF ELECTION FROM THE FRIDAY NEXT FOLLOWING THE ELECTION TO THE MONDAY NEXT FOLLOWING THE ELECTION; AND TO AMEND SECTION 7‑17‑20, RELATING TO THE CANVASS OF VOTES, SO AS TO REQUIRE THE COUNTY BOARD OF CANVASSERS TO SUBMIT THEIR RESULTS TO THE STATE BOARD OF CANVASSERS BY NOON ON THE TUESDAY FOLLOWING THE ELECTION.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Article 4, Chapter 5, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑5‑321. (A) An elector registered to vote or submitting an application for voter registration may have the information relating to his residence address, telephone number, and email address appearing on the application, or any list or roster or index prepared from his application, declared confidential upon presentation of a certified copy of an injunction or a restraining order issued pursuant to Section 16‑3‑1750 or 16‑3‑1760.

(B) To declare information confidential pursuant to subsection (A), the elector must submit the certified copy of injunction or restraining order along with an application for confidentiality form as prescribed by the South Carolina Election Commission in person at a voter registration agency listed in Section 7‑5‑310(B).”

SECTION 2. Article 1, Chapter 17, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑17‑25. Post‑election audits to correct or verify the outcome of all elections must be completed by the county boards of voter registration and elections prior to certification of the election pursuant to regulations promulgated by the State Election Commission. These regulations shall include a provision that audit data and reports must be available to the public.”

SECTION 3. Section 5‑15‑100 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 5‑15‑100. The municipal election commission ~~shall~~ must be vested with the functions, powers, and duties of Municipal Supervisors of Registration if no such supervisors have been appointed pursuant to Section 7‑5‑640, and ~~shall~~ also shall have the functions, powers, and duties of commissioners of election, as set forth in Section 7‑13‑70 and other provisions of Title 7. The municipal election commission shall insure proper books of registration are provided for each ward or precinct, shall prepare and distribute ballots and election materials, appoint managers of election for each polling place and otherwise supervise and conduct all municipal, special, and general elections. The managers shall certify the results of the election to the commission within ~~one day~~ two days and the commission shall declare the results not later than three days following the election.

Nominees in a party primary or party convention and nominees by petition ~~shall~~ must be certified to the municipal election commission within the time specified ~~herein~~ in this section and when so certified, the commission shall place the names of ~~such~~ these nominees upon the ballots.”

SECTION 4. Section 7‑3‑20 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 196 of 2014, is further amended by adding an appropriately lettered subsection at the end to read:

“( ) All State Election Commission directives to the county boards of voter registration and elections must be in writing and sent to both the directors and the chairman of the county boards.”

SECTION 5. Section 7‑3‑25 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 196 of 2014, is further amended by adding an appropriately lettered subsection at the end to read:

“( ) A county board of voter registration and elections may appeal to the full State Election Commission by a directive from the staff of the State Election Commission made to the county board. The county board shall exercise its appellate rights within forty‑five days of receiving the directive to which it objects.”

SECTION 6. Section 7‑11‑15 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 61 of 2013, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑11‑15. (A) In order to qualify as a candidate to run in the general election, all candidates seeking nomination by political party primary or political party convention must file a statement of intention of candidacy and party pledge and submit any filing fees between noon on March sixteenth and noon on March thirtieth as provided in this section.

(1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, candidates seeking nomination for a statewide, congressional, or district office that includes more than one county must file their statements of intention of candidacy, and party pledge and submit any filing fees with the State Election Commission.

(2) Candidates seeking nomination for the State Senate or House of Representatives must file their statements of intention of candidacy and party pledge and submit any filing fees with the county board of voter registration and elections in the county of their residence. The state executive committees must certify candidates pursuant to Section 7‑13‑40.

(3) Candidates seeking nomination for a countywide or less than countywide office shall file their statements of intention of candidacy and party pledge and submit any filing fees with the county ~~election commission~~ board of voter registration and elections in the county of their residence.

(B) Except as provided ~~herein~~ in this section, the ~~election commission~~ board of voter registration and elections with whom the documents in subsection (A) are filed ~~must~~ shall provide a copy of all statements of intention of candidacy, the party pledge, receipt and filing fees, to the appropriate political party executive committee within two days following the deadline for filing. If the second day falls on Saturday, Sunday, or a legal holiday, the statement of intention of candidacy, party pledge, and filing fee must be filed by noon the following day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday. ~~No~~ A candidate’s name may not appear on a primary election ballot, convention slate of candidates, general election ballot, or special election ballot, except as otherwise provided by law, if:

(1) the candidate’s statement of intention of candidacy and party pledge has not been filed with the county ~~election commission~~ board of voter registration and elections or State Election Commission, as the case may be, as well as any filing fee, by the deadline; and

(2) the candidate has not been certified by the appropriate political party as required by Sections 7‑13‑40 and 7‑13‑350, as applicable.

The candidate’s name must appear if the candidate produces the signed and dated copy of his timely filed statement of intention of candidacy. An error or omission by a person seeking to qualify as a candidate pursuant to this section that is not directly related to a constitutional or statutory qualification for that office must be construed in a manner that favors the person’s access to the ballot.

(C) The statement of intention of candidacy required in this section and in Section 7‑13‑190(B) must be on a form designed and provided by the State Election Commission. This form, in addition to all other information, must contain an affirmation that the candidate meets, or will meet by the time of the general election, or as otherwise required by law, the qualifications for the office sought. The candidate must file ~~three~~ a signed ~~copies~~ statement of intention of candidacy and the election commission with ~~whom~~ which it is filed must stamp ~~each copy~~ the statement with the date and time received, keep ~~one copy~~ the original statement, ~~return one~~ provide a copy to the candidate, and ~~send one~~ provide a copy to the appropriate political party executive committee.

(D) The candidate must file ~~three~~ a signed ~~copies of the~~ party pledge, as required pursuant to Section 7‑11‑210, and the election commission with whom it is filed must stamp ~~each copy~~ the party pledge with the date and time received, ~~return one~~ provide a copy to the candidate, and ~~send one~~ provide a copy to the appropriate political party executive committee.

(E) The ~~candidate must sign a receipt for the filing fee, and the~~ election commission with ~~whom~~ which ~~it~~ the filing fee is filed must issue a receipt for the filing fee, stamp the receipt with the date and time the filing fee was received, provide ~~one~~ a copy to the candidate, and provide ~~one~~ a copy to the appropriate political executive party. The filing fee must be made payable to the appropriate political party.

(F) If, after the closing of the time for filing the documents required pursuant to this section, there are not more than two candidates for any one office and one or more of the candidates dies, or withdraws, the state or county committee, as the case may be, if the nomination is by political party primary or political party convention only ~~may~~, in its discretion, may afford opportunity for the entry of other candidates for the office involved; however, for the office of State House of Representatives or State Senator, the discretion must be exercised by the state committee.

(G) The county chairman of a political party and the chairman of the state executive committee of a political party may designate a person to observe the filings made at the election commission pursuant to this section.

(H) The provisions of this section do not apply to nonpartisan school trustee elections in ~~any~~ a school district where local law provisions provide for other dates and procedures for filing statements of candidacy or petitions, and to the extent the provisions of this section and the local law provisions conflict, the local law provisions control.”

SECTION 7. Section 7‑11‑80 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 510 of 1984, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑11‑80. All nominating petitions for ~~any~~ a political office or petition of ~~any~~ a political party seeking certification as such in the State of South Carolina ~~shall~~ must be standardized as follows:

(1) ~~Shall~~ must be on good quality original bond paper sized 8 1/2 ′′ X 14′′ or 8 1/2′′ X 11′′~~.~~;

(2) shall contain a concise statement of purpose; in the case of nomination of candidates, the name of the candidate, the office for which he offers and the date of the election for ~~such~~ the office ~~shall~~ must be contained in ~~such~~ the petition~~.~~;

(3) shall contain in separate columns from left to right the following:

(a) signature of voter and printed name of voter;

(b) address of residence where registered; and

(c) precinct of voter~~.~~;

(4) no single petition page shall contain the signatures of registered voters from different counties~~.~~;

(5) all signatures of registered voters ~~shall~~ must be numbered consecutively~~.~~; and

(6) petitions with more than one page ~~must~~ shall have the pages consecutively numbered upon filing with the appropriate authority.

The State Election Commission may furnish petition forms to the county election officials and to interested persons.”

SECTION 8. Section 7‑13‑35 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 434 of 1996, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑13‑35. (A) The authority charged by law with conducting an election must publish two notices of general, municipal, special, and primary elections held in the county in a newspaper of general circulation in the county or municipality, as appropriate. Included in each notice must be a reminder of the last day persons may register to be eligible to vote in the election for which notice is given, notification of the date, time, and location of the hearing on ballots challenged in the election, a list of the precincts involved in the election, the location of the polling places in each of the precincts, and notification that the process of examining the return‑addressed envelopes containing absentee ballots may begin at ~~2:00 p.m.~~ 7:00 a.m. on election day at a place designated in the notice by the authority charged with conducting the election. The first notice must appear not later than sixty days before the election and the second notice must appear not later than two weeks after the first notice.

(B) In the event the election is postponed, the election must be held on the first Tuesday after the originally scheduled election day.”

SECTION 9. Section 7‑13‑190 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 3 of 2003, is further amended by adding:

“(F) In the event the Governor declares a state of emergency covering an entire jurisdiction holding an election, the election must be postponed and held on the following Tuesday. This subsection does not apply to statewide primaries and general elections, unless the state of emergency declaration covers the entire State.”

SECTION 10. Section 7‑15‑420 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 284 of 2006, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑420. (A) The county board of voter registration and elections, municipal election commission, or executive committee of each municipal party in the case of municipal primary elections is responsible for the tabulation and reporting of absentee ballots. At ~~9:00~~ 7:00 a.m. on election day, the managers appointed pursuant to Section 7‑5‑10, and in the presence of any watchers who have been appointed pursuant to Section 7‑13‑860, may begin the process of examining the return‑addressed envelopes that have been received by the county board of voter registration and elections making certain that each oath has been properly signed and witnessed and includes the address of the witness. All return‑addressed envelopes received by the county board of voter registration and elections before the time for closing the polls must be examined in this manner. A ballot may not be counted unless the oath is properly signed and witnessed nor may ~~any~~ a ballot be counted which is received by the county board of voter registration and elections after time for closing of the polls. The printed instructions required by Section 7‑15‑370(2) to be sent each absentee ballot applicant ~~must~~ shall notify him that his vote will not be counted in either of these events. If a ballot is not challenged, the sealed return‑addressed envelope must be opened by the managers, and the enclosed envelope marked ‘Ballot Herein’ removed and placed in a locked box or boxes. After all return‑addressed envelopes have been emptied in this manner, the managers shall remove the ballots contained in the envelopes marked ‘Ballot Herein’, placing each one in the ballot box provided for the applicable contest. Beginning at ~~9:00~~ 7:00 a.m. on election day, the absentee ballots may be ~~tabulated~~ processed, including any absentee ballots received on election day before the polls are closed. Absentee ballots may not be tabulated until after the polls are closed on election day. If ~~any~~ a ballot is challenged, the return‑addressed envelope must not be opened, but must be put aside and the procedure set forth in Section 7‑13‑830 must be utilized; but the absentee voter must be given reasonable notice of the challenged ballot. Results of the tabulation must not be publicly reported until after the polls are closed.

(B) Anyone who prematurely releases information to the public regarding the tabulation of ballots in violation of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined up to one thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than ninety days.”

SECTION 11. Section 7‑17‑10 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 261 of 2002, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑17‑10. The commissioners of election for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, state officers, circuit solicitors, members of the General Assembly, and county officers or any of these officers shall meet in some convenient place at the county seat on the ~~Friday~~ Monday next following the election, before one o’clock in the afternoon of that day, and shall proceed to organize as the county board of canvassers. They may appoint some competent person as secretary. The chairman ~~shall~~ then shall proceed to administer the constitutional oath to each member of the board, as canvassers, and shall administer the constitutional oath to the secretary, and the secretary shall administer to the chairman the same oath that he has administered to the other members of the board. The commissioners of election for members of Congress and presidential electors or any of these officers shall likewise meet at the same time at the county seat and shall in the same manner proceed to organize as the county board of canvassers for the election of the federal officers.”

SECTION 12. Section 7‑17‑20 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 7‑17‑20. The county board of canvassers, respectively, ~~shall~~ then shall proceed to canvass the votes of the county and make ~~such~~ the statements of ~~such~~ these votes as the nature of the election shall require no later than noon on the ~~Saturday~~ Tuesday next following the election and at ~~such~~ that time shall transmit to the State Board of Canvassers the results of their findings.”

SECTION 13. The provisions of this act are severable. If any section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, item, subitem, sentence, clause, phrase, or word of this act is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such holding shall not affect the constitutionality or validity of the remaining portions of the act, the General Assembly hereby declaring that it would have passed each and every section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, item, subitem, sentence, clause, phrase, and word thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more other sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, items, subitems, sentences, clauses, phrases, or words hereof may be declared to be unconstitutional, invalid, or otherwise ineffective.

SECTION 14. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

‑‑‑‑XX‑‑‑‑