**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 7‑13‑25 SO AS TO ESTABLISH EARLY VOTING PROCEDURES; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑3‑20, AS AMENDED, RELATING TO DUTIES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION, SO AS TO FURTHER DEFINE HIS DUTIES; AND TO AMEND SECTION 7‑15‑320, RELATING TO PERSONS QUALIFIED TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT, SO AS TO INCLUDE VOTING DURING THE EARLY VOTING PERIOD.

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

SECTION 1. Article 1, Chapter 13, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑13‑25. (A) Notwithstanding the provision of this chapter or Chapter 5 of this title, the authority charged by law with conducting an election shall establish a procedure by which a qualified elector may cast his ballot, without excuse, during an early voting period for all elections. The qualified elector may cast a ballot during an early voting period pursuant to this section.

(B) Early voting centers must be established and maintained to ensure that voters may cast only one ballot.

(C) A qualified elector may cast his ballot at an early voting center in the county in which he resides.

(D) Each county board of registration and elections must establish at least one early voting center and may establish up to three early voting centers. The county board of registration and elections will determine the location of the early voting center or centers. Each early voting center must be supervised by election commission employees.

(E) The early voting period begins eleven days before an election and ends three days prior to the election.

(F) The county board of registration and elections must determine the hours of operation and location for an early voting center. However, the early voting center must be open for two Saturdays within the early voting period for statewide primaries and general elections.

(G) In addition to the early voting centers established pursuant to Section 7‑13‑25, a county board of registration and elections may authorize up to two additional early voting centers if the county board of registration and elections finds there is a need for additional early voting centers after holding a public hearing on the matter. The county board of registration and elections will determine the location of the early voting center or centers.”

(H) A sign must be posted prominently in an early voting center and must have printed on it, ‘VOTING MORE THAN ONCE IS A MISDEMEANOR AND, UPON CONVICTION, A PERSON MUST BE FINED IN THE DISCRETION OF THE COURT OR IMPRISONED NOT MORE THAN THREE YEARS’.”

SECTION 2. Section 7‑3‑20(C) of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 253 of 2006, is further amended to read:

“(C) The executive director shall:

(1) maintain a complete master file of all qualified electors by county and by precincts;

(2) delete the name of any elector:

(a) who is deceased;

(b) who is no longer qualified to vote in the precinct where currently registered;

(c) who has been convicted of a disqualifying crime;

(d) who is otherwise no longer qualified to vote as may be provided by law; or

(e) who requests in writing that his name be removed;

(3) enter names on the master file as they are reported by the county registration boards;

(4) furnish each county registration board with a master list of all registered voters in the county, together with a copy of all registered voters in each precinct of the county, at least ten days prior to each election. The precinct copies shall be used as the official list of voters;

(5) maintain all information furnished his office relating to the inclusion or deletion of names from the master file for four years;

(6) purchase, lease, or contract for the use of such equipment as may be necessary to properly execute the duties of his office, subject to the approval of the State Election Commission;

(7) secure from the United States courts and federal and state agencies available information as to persons convicted of disqualifying crimes;

(8) obtain information from any other source which may assist him in carrying out the purposes of this section;

(9) perform such other duties relating to elections as may be assigned him by the State Election Commission;

(10) furnish at reasonable price any precinct lists to a qualified elector requesting them;

(11) serve as the chief state election official responsible for implementing and coordinating the state’s responsibilities under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993; ~~and~~

(12) serve as the chief state election official responsible for implementing and enforcing the state’s responsibilities under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), as set forth in the United States Code, Title 42, Section 1973ff, et seq; and

(13) enter into the master file a separate designation each for voters casting absentee ballots and early ballots in a general election.”

SECTION 3. Section 7‑15‑320 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑320 . (A) Any qualified elector may vote during the early voting period pursuant to Section 7‑13‑25.

(B) A qualified elector in any of the following categories must be permitted to vote by absentee ballot in all elections when he is absent from his county of residence on election day during the hours the polls are open, to an extent that it prevents him from voting in person except that physically disabled persons, certified poll watchers, poll managers, county voter registration board members and staff, and county election commission members and staff working on election day, a person admitted to a hospital as an emergency patient on the day of an election or within a four day period before an election, and persons whose employment obligations ~~required~~ require that they be at their place of employment during the hours that the polls are open and present written certification of that obligation to the county registration board, and persons confined to a jail or pre‑trial facility pending disposition of arrest or trial may vote by absentee ballot whether or not absent from their county of residence:

(1) students, their spouses, and dependents residing with them;

(2) members of the Armed Forces and Merchant Marines of the United States, their spouses, and dependents residing with them;

(3) persons serving with the American Red Cross or with the United Service Organizations (USO) who are attached to and serving with the Armed Forces of the United States, their spouses, and dependents residing with them;

(4) persons in employment;

(5) physically disabled persons;

(6) governmental employees, their spouses, and dependents residing with them;

(7) electors with a death or funeral in the family within a three day period before the election;

(8) persons on vacation (who by virtue of vacation plans will be absent from their county of residence on election day);

(9) certified poll watchers, poll managers, county voter registration board members and staff, county and state election commission members and staff working on election day;

(10) overseas citizens;

(11) persons attending sick or physically disabled persons;

(12) persons admitted to hospitals as emergency patients on the day of an election or within a four day period before the election;

(13) persons who will be serving as jurors in a state or federal court on election day;

(14) persons sixty‑five years of age or older;

(15) persons confined to a jail or pre‑trial facility pending disposition of arrest or trial~~.~~;”

SECTION 4. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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