CORRECTED AND REPRINTED

~~Indicates Matter Stricken~~

Indicates New Matter

AMENDED

May 28, 2015

**H. 3154**

Introduced by Reps. J.E. Smith, G.M. Smith, Cobb‑Hunter, M.S. McLeod, Toole, Weeks, Whipper, Robinson‑Simpson, Quinn and Bales

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Read the first time April 29, 2015.

**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING ARTICLE 9 TO CHAPTER 15, TITLE 7 SO AS TO ENACT THE “SOUTH CAROLINA UNIFORM MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS ACT”, TO DEFINE NECESSARY TERMS, AND PROVIDE REGISTRATION AND ABSENTEE VOTING ALTERNATIVES FOR CERTAIN MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS.

Amend Title To Conform

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

SECTION 1. Section 5‑15‑100 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 5‑15‑100. The municipal election commission shall 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 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 be certified to the municipal election commission within the time specified herein and when so certified, the commission shall place the names of such nominees upon the ballots.”

SECTION 2. 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 3. 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 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 4. Chapter 5, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑5‑321. (A) Any elector registered to vote or submitting an application for voter registration may have the information relating to his residence address, telephone number, and e‑mail address appearing on the application, or any list or roster or index prepared therefrom, declared confidential upon presentation of a certified copy of an injunction or a restraining order issued pursuant to Section 16‑3‑1750 or Section 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 any voter registration agency listed in Section 7‑5‑310(B).”

SECTION 5. Section 7‑11‑15 of the 1976 Code, last amended by Act 61 of 2013, is 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 board of voter registration and elections in the county of their residence.

(B) Except as provided herein, the election commission with whom the documents in subsection (A) are filed must 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 candidate’s name may 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 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 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 ~~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, 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 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 6. Section 7‑11‑80 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

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

(1) Shall 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 office shall be contained in such 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 be numbered consecutively.

(6) Petitions with more than one page must 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 7. Section 7‑13‑35 of the 1976 Code is 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 shall be held on the first Tuesday after the originally scheduled election day.”

SECTION 8. Section 7‑13‑190 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“(F) In the event the Governor declares a state of emergency covering an entire jurisdiction holding an election, the election shall 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 9. Section 7‑13‑350(B) of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“(B) Candidates for President and Vice President must be certified not later than twelve o’clock noon on ~~September tenth~~ the first Tuesday following the first Monday in September to the State Election Commission~~, or if September tenth falls on Sunday, not later than twelve o’clock noon on the following Monday~~.”

SECTION 10. Section 7‑15‑10 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑10. The State Election Commission is responsible for carrying out the provisions of ~~Article 3 and Article 5 of~~ this chapter. The commission may promulgate regulations, and must have drafted, printed, and distributed all forms that are required to make it possible for persons ~~listed in Section 7‑15‑320~~ eligible to vote by absentee ballot in primary, general, and special elections. Regulations promulgated pursuant to this section must be promulgated in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act.”

SECTION 11. Section 7‑15‑20 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑20. Article 3, ~~and~~ Article 5, and Article 9 of this chapter shall be liberally construed in order to effectuate their purposes.”

SECTION 12. Section 7‑15‑310 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 392 of 2000, is further amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑310. As used in this article:

(1) ~~The term~~ ‘Members of the Armed Forces of the United States’ means members of the United States Army, the United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the United States Air Force, the United States Coast Guard, or any of their respective components.

(2) ~~The term~~ ‘Members of the Merchant Marine of the United States’ means all officers and men engaged in maritime service on board ships.

(3) ~~The term~~ ‘Students’ means all persons residing outside of the counties of their respective residences, enrolled in an institution of learning.

(4) ~~The term~~ ‘Physically disabled person’ means a person who, because of injury or illness, cannot be present in person at his voting place on election day.

(5) ~~The term~~ ‘Registration form’ means Standard Form 76, or ~~any~~ a subsequent form replacing it, authorized by the federal government or the state form described in Section 7‑15‑120.

(6) ~~The term~~ ‘Persons in employment’ means those persons who by virtue of their employment obligations are unable to vote in person.

(7) ~~The term~~ ‘Authorized representative’ means a registered elector who, with the voter’s permission, acts on behalf of a voter unable to go to the polls because of illness or disability resulting in his confinement in a hospital, sanatorium, nursing home, or place of residence, or a voter unable because of a physical handicap to go to his polling place or because of ~~such~~ a handicap is unable to vote at his polling place due to existing architectural barriers which that deny him physical access to the polling place, voting booth, or voting apparatus or machinery. Under no circumstance shall a candidate or a member of a candidate’s paid campaign staff or volunteers reimbursed for the time they expend on campaign activity be considered an ‘authorized representative’ of an elector desiring to vote by absentee ballot.

(8) ~~The term~~ ‘Immediate family’ means a person’s spouse, parents, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, and mothers‑in‑law, fathers‑in‑law, brothers‑in‑law, sisters‑in‑law, sons‑in‑law, and daughters‑in‑law.

(9) ~~The term~~ ‘Overseas citizen’ means a citizen of the United States residing outside of the United States as specified by Section 7‑15‑110.

SECTION 13. 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 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 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 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 14. Chapter 15, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Article 9

South Carolina Uniform Military and Overseas Voters

Section 7‑15‑600. This act may be cited as the ‘South Carolina Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act’.

Section 7‑15‑610. As used in this article:

(1) ‘Members of the Armed Forces of the United States’ means members of the United States Army, the United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the United States Air Force, the United States Coast Guard, or any of their respective components. (310)

(2) ‘Members of the Merchant Marine of the United States’ means all officers and men engaged in maritime service on board ships. (310)

(3) ‘Registration form’ means Standard Form 76, or ~~any~~ a subsequent form replacing it, authorized by the federal government or the state form described in Section 7‑15‑120.

(4) ‘Overseas citizen’ means a citizen of the United States residing outside of the United States who is a:

(a) member of the Armed Forces of the United States;

(b) member of the Merchant Marine of the United States;

(c) person serving with the American Red Cross or the United Service Organizations (USO) attached to and serving with the Armed Forces of the United States outside of the county of his residence in South Carolina;

(d) members or employees of any department of the United States Government serving overseas;

(e) citizen of the United States residing outside the United States:

(i) if he last resided in South Carolina immediately before his departure from the United States;

(ii) if he could have met all qualifications to vote in federal elections in South Carolina even though while residing outside the United States he does not have a place of abode or other address in South Carolina; even if his intent to return to South Carolina may be uncertain, as long as he has complied with all applicable South Carolina qualifications and requirements which are consistent with the Uniformed and Overseas Absentee Voting Act (Public Law 99‑410).

(5) ‘Covered voter’ means:

(a) a uniformed‑service voter or an overseas voter who is registered to vote in this State;

(b) a uniformed‑service voter whose voting residence is in this State and who otherwise satisfies this state’s voter eligibility requirements;

(c) an overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, was last eligible to vote in this State and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state’s voter eligibility requirements;

(d) an overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, would have been last eligible to vote in this State had the voter then been of voting age and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state’s voter eligibility requirements; or

(e) an overseas voter who was born outside the United States, is not described in subitem (c) or (d), and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state’s voter eligibility requirements, if:

(i) the last place where a parent or legal guardian of the voter was, or under this article would have been, eligible to vote before leaving the United States is within this State; and

(ii) the voter has not previously registered to vote in any other state.

(6) ‘Dependent’ means an individual recognized as a dependent by a uniformed service.

(7) ‘Federal postcard application’ means the application prescribed under Section 101(b)(2) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 1973ff(b)(2), or its successor.

(8) ‘Federal write‑in absentee ballot’ means the ballot described in Section 103 of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 1973ff‑2, or its successor.

(9) ‘Military‑overseas ballot’ means:

(a) a federal write‑in absentee ballot;

(b) a ballot specifically prepared or distributed for use by a covered voter in accordance with this article; or

(c) a ballot cast by a covered voter in accordance with this article.

(10) ‘Overseas voter’ means a United States citizen who resides outside the United States.

(11) ‘Uniformed‑service’ means:

(a) active and reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States;

(b) the Merchant Marine, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, or the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States; or

(c) the National Guard or organized militia.

(12) ‘Uniformed‑service voter’ means an individual who is qualified to vote and is:

(a) a member of the active or reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States who is on active duty;

(b) a member of the Merchant Marine, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, or the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States;

(c) a member on activated status of the National Guard or organized militia; or

(d) a spouse or dependent of a member referred to in this item.

Section 7‑15‑620. Notwithstanding other provisions of law, a voter who meets the requirements of this article may utilize the absentee ballot process established by this article, or as otherwise permitted by state or federal law.

Section 7‑15‑630. Applications for, and issuance of, special write‑in absentee ballots; alternate submission of federal write‑in absentee ballot.

(A) A qualified elector of this State who is eligible to vote as provided by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, set forth in the United States Code, Title 42, Section 1973ff, et seq., or its successor, may apply not earlier than ninety days before an election for a special write‑in absentee ballot. This ballot must be used for each general and special election and primaries for federal offices, statewide offices, and members of the General Assembly.

(B) The application for a special write‑in absentee ballot may be made on the federal postcard application form, or its electronic equivalent or on a form prescribed by the State Election Commission.

(C) In order to qualify for a special write‑in absentee ballot, the voter must state that he is unable to vote by regular absentee ballot or in person due to requirements of military service or due to living in isolated areas or extremely remote areas of the world. This statement may be made on the federal postcard application or on a form prepared by the State Election Commission and supplied and returned with the special write‑in absentee ballot.

(D) Upon receipt of this application, the county board of voter registration and elections shall issue the special write‑in absentee ballot which must be prescribed and provided by the State Election Commission. The ballot shall list the offices for election in the general election. It may list the candidates for office if known at the time of election. This ballot shall permit the elector to vote by writing in a party preference for each federal, state, and local office, the names of specific candidates for each federal, state, and local office, or the name of the person whom the voter prefers for each office.

(E) A qualified elector may alternatively submit a federal write‑in absentee ballot for any federal, state, or local office or state or local ballot measure.

Section 7‑15‑640. (A) A covered voter may use a federal postcard application, the federal postcard application’s electronic equivalent, or another method approved by the federal government or the State Election Commission to apply to register to vote.

(B) A covered voter may use the declaration accompanying a federal write‑in absentee ballot to apply to register to vote simultaneously with the submission of the federal write‑in absentee ballot, if the declaration is received before the closure of the registration books for that election pursuant to Sections 7‑5‑120, 7‑5‑150 or 7‑5‑155, as appropriate. If the declaration is received after that date, it must be treated as an application to register to vote for subsequent elections.

(C) The Executive Director of the State Election Commission shall ensure that the election commission’s electronic transmission system is capable of accepting both a federal postcard application and any other approved electronic registration application sent to the appropriate election official. The voter may use the electronic transmission system or any other approved method to register to vote.

Section 7‑15‑650. Voters eligible to vote under Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act; absentee instant runoff ballots for second primaries.

(A) For the qualified electors of this State who are eligible to vote as provided by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, set forth in the United States Code, Title 42, Section 1973ff, et seq., or its successor, an absentee ballot with an absentee instant runoff ballot for each potential second primary must be sent to the elector at least forty‑five days prior to the primary election.

(B) The absentee instant runoff ballots for second primaries must be prepared by the authority charged with conducting the election.

(C) The absentee instant runoff ballot for a second primary shall permit the elector to vote his order of preference for each candidate for each office by indicating a rank next to the candidate’s name on the ballot. However, the elector shall not be required to indicate his preference for more than one candidate on the ballot if he so chooses.

(D) The special absentee ballot shall be designated as an ‘absentee instant runoff ballot’ and be clearly distinguishable from the regular absentee ballot.

(E) Instructions explaining the absentee instant runoff voting process must be provided with the ballot to the qualified elector.

(F) The State Election Commission shall promulgate regulations necessary for the implementation of this section.

Section 7‑15‑660. An overseas voter who is registering to vote, and who is eligible to vote in this State shall use, and must be assigned to, the voting precinct of the address of the voter’s last place of residence in this State, or in the case of a voter described by Section 7‑15‑610(5)(e), the address of the voter’s parent’s or legal guardian’s place of last residence in this State. If that address is no longer a recognized residential address, the overseas voter must be assigned an address within the voting precinct of the last place of residence for voting purposes.

Section 7‑15‑670. (A) A covered voter may use the declaration accompanying a federal write‑in absentee ballot as an application for a military‑overseas ballot simultaneously with the submission of the federal write‑in absentee ballot, if the declaration is received by the appropriate election official by seven o’clock p.m. on election day*.*

(B) To receive the benefits of this article, a covered voter must inform the appropriate election official that the voter is a covered voter. Methods of informing the appropriate election official that a voter is a covered voter include:

(1) the use of a federal postcard application or federal write‑in absentee ballot;

(2) the use of an overseas address on an approved voter registration application or ballot application; and

(3) the inclusion on an approved voter registration application or ballot application of other information sufficient to identify the voter as a covered voter.

Section 7‑15‑680. An absentee ballot must be sent to a covered voter, upon the voter’s request, at least forty‑five days prior to any election. However, if a ballot application from a covered voter arrives within the forty‑five day period, an absentee ballot must be sent to the covered voter no later than five o’clock p.m. on the next business day after the application arrives.

Section 7‑15‑690. (A) To ensure that all South Carolina residents eligible to vote as provided by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, set forth in the United States Code, Title 42, Section 1973ff, et seq., or its successor, have the opportunity to receive and cast any ballot they would have been eligible to cast if they resided in and had remained in South Carolina, the State Election Commission must, in cooperation with United States government agencies, take all steps and action as may be necessary including, but not limited to, electronic transmissions of Standard Form 76A, or its successor form, issued by the federal government as an application for voter registration and an application for absentee ballots and electronic transmissions of absentee ballots for all elections for federal, state, and local offices to voters in accordance with his preferred method of transmission.

(B) The State Election Commission shall promulgate regulations necessary for the implementation of this section.

Section 7‑15‑700. (A) A valid military‑overseas ballot must be counted if it is delivered to the address that the State Election Commission or county board of voter registration and elections, as appropriate, has specified by the close of business on the business day before the county canvass.

(C) If, at the time of completing a military‑overseas ballot and balloting materials, the voter has declared under penalty of perjury that the ballot was timely submitted, the ballot may not be rejected on the basis that it has a late postmark, an unreadable postmark, or no postmark as long as the ballot was received in accordance with subsection (A).

Section 7‑15‑710. A military‑overseas ballot must include, or be accompanied by, a declaration signed by the voter that a material misstatement of fact in completing the ballot may be grounds for a conviction of perjury under the laws of the United States or this State.

Section 7‑15‑720. The Executive Director of the State Election Commission, in coordination withthe county boards of voter registration and elections shall implement an electronic free‑access system by which a covered voter may determine whether:

(1) the voter’s federal postcard application or other registration or military‑overseas ballot application has been received and accepted; or

(2) the voter’s military‑overseas ballot has been received and the current status of the ballot.

Section 7‑15‑730. (A) The county board of voter registration and elections or the State Election Commission, as appropriate, shall request an electronic‑mail address from each covered voter who registers to vote after the effective date of this article. An electronic‑mail address provided by a covered voter may not be made available to the public or any individual or organization other than an employee or official with the county board of voter registration and elections or the State Election Commission, and is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information laws of this State. The electronic‑mail address may be used only for official communication with the covered voter about the voting process, including transmitting military‑overseas ballots and election materials if the voter has requested electronic transmission, and verifying the covered voter’s mailing address and physical location. The request for an electronic‑mail address must describe the purposes for which the electronic‑mail address may be used and include a statement that any other use or disclosure of the electronic‑mail address is prohibited.

(B) A covered voter who provides an electronic‑mail address may request that the voter’s application for a military‑overseas ballot be considered a standing request for electronic delivery of a ballot for all elections held through December thirty‑first of the year following the calendar year of the date of the application or another shorter period the voter specifies, including for any runoff elections that occur as a result of those elections. An election official or employee shall provide a military‑overseas ballot to a covered voter who makes a standing request for each election to which the request is applicable. A covered voter who is entitled to receive a military‑overseas ballot for a primary election under this subsection is entitled to receive a military‑overseas ballot for the general election.

Section 7‑15‑740. (A) At least one hundred days before a regularly scheduled election and as soon as practicable before an election not regularly scheduled, the Executive Director of the State Election Commission shall prepare appropriate election notices to be used in conjunction with a federal write‑in absentee ballot. The election notice must contain a list of all of the ballot measures and federal, state, and local offices that as of that date the official expects to be on the ballot on the date of the election. The notice also must contain specific instructions for how a voter is to indicate on the federal write‑in absentee ballot the voter’s choice for each office to be filled and for each ballot measure to be contested.

(B) A covered voter may request a copy of an election notice. The executive director shall send the notice to the voter by facsimile, electronic mail, or regular mail, as the voter requests.

(C) As soon as ballot styles are certified, and not later than the date ballots are required to be transmitted to voters pursuant to Article 5, Chapter 15 of this title, the executive director shall update the notice with the certified candidates for each office and ballot measure questions and make the updated notice publicly available.

(D) A county board of voter registration and elections that maintains an online website shall make the election notice available by linking to the State Election Commission website.

Section 7‑15‑750. (A) If a covered voter’s mistake or omission in the completion of a document pursuant to this article does not prevent determining whether a covered voter is eligible to vote, the mistake or omission does not invalidate the document. Failure to satisfy a nonsubstantive requirement, such as using paper or envelopes of a specified size or weight, does not invalidate a document submitted pursuant to this article. In a write‑in ballot authorized by this article or in a vote for a write‑in candidate on a regular ballot, if the intention of the voter is discernable pursuant to the laws of this State, an abbreviation, misspelling, or other minor variation in the form of the name of a candidate or a political party must be accepted as a valid vote.

(B) Notarization is not required for the execution of a document pursuant to this article. An authentication, other than the declaration specified in Section 7‑15‑710, or the declaration on the federal postcard application and federal write‑in absentee ballot, is not required for execution of a document pursuant to this article. The declaration and any information in the declaration may be compared with information on file to ascertain the validity of the document.

Section 7‑15‑760. A court may issue an injunction or grant other equitable relief appropriate to ensure substantial compliance with, or enforce, this article on application by:

(1) a covered voter alleging a grievance under this article; or

(2) an election official in this State.”

SECTION 15. Section 7‑17‑10 of the 1976 Code is 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 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 16. Section 7‑17‑20 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

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

SECTION 17. 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 election prior to certification of the election pursuant to regulations promulgated by the State Election Commission. These regulations must include a provision that audit data and reports must be available to the public.”

SECTION 18. The 1976 Code of Laws is amended by repealing Sections 7‑15‑400, 7‑15‑405, 7‑15‑406, and 7‑15‑460.

SECTION 19. 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 20. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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