**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 7‑13‑1625 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT AFTER THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THIS ACT, ALL VOTING SYSTEMS USED IN SOUTH CAROLINA SHALL UTILIZE A PAPER‑BASED SYSTEM USING PAPER BALLOTS TABULATED BY OPTICAL SCANNERS AS THE BALLOT OF RECORD, AND TO REQUIRE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO APPROPRIATE THE FUNDS NECESSARY TO PURCHASE THE VOTING SYSTEMS REQUIRED BY THIS SECTION; AND BY ADDING SECTION 7‑13‑1635 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT BEGINNING WITH THE 2022 GENERAL ELECTION CYCLE, THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONIN CONJUNCTION WITH THE COUNTY BOARDS OF VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS, AS NECESSARY, SHALL CONDUCT POSTELECTION RISK‑LIMITING AUDITS FOR ALL STATEWIDE PRIMARY, GENERAL, AND SPECIAL ELECTIONS, INCLUDING STATEWIDE RUNOFF ELECTIONS, TO DEFINE RELEVANT TERMS, AND TO AUTHORIZE THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION TO PROMULGATE REGULATIONS REGARDING THE PROCEDURES AND USE OF RISK‑LIMITING AUDITS.

Whereas, the people’s right to vote is one of the most sacred and fundamental rights protected by our state and federal constitutions; and

Whereas, the public’s steadfast confidence in the electoral process is a cornerstone of the American political system, and our way of life; and

Whereas, technological advances seemed to make paper ballots obsolete in the early twenty‑first century; however, the 2016 United States presidential election and Robert Mueller’s ensuing Special Counsel Investigation confirmed that computerized voting equipment is inherently vulnerable to programming error, equipment malfunction, and malicious tampering; and

Whereas, in May of 2018, the Senate Intelligence Committee issued a report that concluded Russian cyber actors surveilled approximately twenty state election systems with the intent of undermining confidence in the U.S. voting process in 2016; and

Whereas, the Senate Intelligence Committee noted further that many state electronic voting systems are now outdated and recommended that all states go back to paper ballots; and

Whereas, numerous studies have shown that optically scanned paper ballots can be counted by machines, but still allow for a full hand recount if there is a dispute about the accuracy of the machine count. Now, therefore,

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

SECTION 1. Article 15, Chapter 13, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑13‑1625. (A) After the effective date of this section, the State of South Carolina or any state or local agency, board, commission, or council may not purchase, lease, acquire, employ, or utilize any type of voting system for use in federal, state, or local elections that does not meet the following requirements:

(1) a voter must be able to mark by hand a paper ballot, which shall be tabulated using an optical scanner;

(2) a voter must be able to insert the marked paper ballot into the optical scanner, unless the voter is entitled to request and has requested assistance to vote pursuant to guidelines under the ‘Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990’ 42 U.S.C. Section 12101, et seq., and in that case the voter shall be assisted;

(3) the optical scanners shall provide a ‘cast vote record’ (CVR) of the individual ballots cast;

(4) the scanners shall adhere to the federal Election Assistance Commission’s Voluntary Voting System Guidelines; and

(5) other requirements, features, or capabilities the State Election Commission deems necessary.

(B)(1) The State Election Commission shall require the county boards of voter registration and elections to maintain all paper ballots cast in an election pursuant to this section for a period of no less than two years following the date of an election. Thereafter, the ballots may be retained in accordance with State Election Commission policy and procedures.

(2) Prior to verification of the election results by the appropriate election authority, the county boards of voter registration and elections shall:

(a) compare and reconcile the number of ballots with the number of voters who signed in at the polling place and who voted by mail‑in, provisional, and military or overseas ballots;

(b) compare and reconcile precinct totals with countywide results to ensure that they add up to the correct sum; and

(c) review and account for all optical scanner memory cards or flash drives to ensure they are properly loaded into the tally server.

(3) After the counties have transitioned to the paper ballot voting system with optical scanners, the county boards of voter registration and elections shall conduct risk‑limiting audits pursuant to the provisions of Section 7‑13‑1635.

(C) The General Assembly shall appropriate the funds necessary to purchase the new equipment, software, and hardware for the paper ballot voting system required by this section and to meet the costs of the risk‑limiting audits required by Section 7‑13‑1635. The State Election Commission is authorized to sell decommissioned voting machines, equipment, and software to other states and retain the proceeds, if any, to support the commission’s training and certification of the members of the county boards of voter registration and elections. The commission also shall apply for grant funding from the United States Election Assistance Commission to help offset these costs.”

SECTION 2. Article 15, Chapter 13, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑13‑1635. (A) The General Assembly finds the auditing of election results is necessary to ensure effective election administration and public confidence in the election results. Further, risk‑limiting audits provide a more effective manner of conducting audits than traditional audit methods in that risk‑limiting audit methods typically require only limited resources for election contests with wide margins of victory while investing greater resources in close contests.

(B) For purposes of this section:

(1) ‘Contest’ means a primary or runoff primary, an election or runoff election for an office or for a measure.

(2) ‘Commission’ means the State Election Commission.

(3) ‘Incorrect outcome’ means an outcome that is inconsistent with the election outcome that would be obtained by conducting a full recount.

(4) ‘Risk‑limiting audit’ means an audit protocol that makes use of statistical methods and is designed to limit to acceptable levels the risk of certifying a preliminary election outcome that constitutes an incorrect outcome.

(C) Beginning with the 2022 general election cycle, the commissionin conjunction with the county boards of voter registration and elections, as necessary, shall conduct postelection risk‑limiting audits pursuant to the provisions of this section and commission regulations. While all contested races are eligible for audit, risk‑limiting audits must be conducted for all statewide primary, general, and special elections, including statewide runoff elections. Additional contests to be audited must be selected in accordance with procedures established by the commission.

(D) The commission shall promulgate regulations necessary to implement and administer the requirements of this section. In connection with the promulgation of the regulations, the commission shall consult with recognized statistical experts, including statistical experts with experience in election auditing, equipment vendors, and the county boards of voter registration and elections. The commission also shall consider the best practices for conducting risk‑limiting audits.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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