**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 2‑19‑70, CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, RELATING TO JUDICIAL CANDIDATES SEEKING PLEDGES FROM MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT PLEDGES FOR JUDICIAL CANDIDATES MAY NOT BE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY SOUGHT OR GIVEN UNTIL TWELVE DAYS AFTER THE INITIAL RELEASE OF THE REPORT CONCERNING NOMINEES TO MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY; AND TO AMEND SECTION 2‑19‑80, RELATING TO THE NOMINATION OF QUALIFIED CANDIDATES TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT A PERIOD OF AT LEAST TWENTY‑TWO DAYS MUST ELAPSE BETWEEN THE DATE OF THE JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION’S INITIAL REPORT OF NOMINATIONS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE DATE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONDUCTS THE ELECTION FOR THESE JUDGESHIPS.

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

SECTION 1. Section 2‑19‑70(C) of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“(C) ~~No candidate for judicial office~~ A person may not ~~seek~~ directly or indirectly seek the pledge of a member of the General Assembly’s vote or, directly or indirectly, contact a member of the General Assembly regarding screening for ~~the~~ any judicial office until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission and the commission has formally released its report as to the qualifications of all candidates for the vacancy to the General Assembly. ~~No~~ A member of the General Assembly may not directly or indirectly offer his pledge until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission and until the commission has formally released its report as to the qualifications of its nominees to the General Assembly. The formal release of the report of qualifications shall occur no earlier than ~~forty‑eight hours~~ noon on the twelfth day after the nominees have been initially released to members of the General Assembly. For purposes of this section, indirectly seeking a pledge means ~~the~~ a person, a candidate, or someone acting on behalf of and at the request of the person or candidate, requesting ~~a person~~ someone to contact a member of the General Assembly on behalf of the person or ~~a~~ candidate before nominations for that office are formally made by the commission. The prohibitions of this section do not extend to an announcement of candidacy by the candidate and statements by the candidate detailing the candidate’s qualifications.”

SECTION 2. Section 2‑19‑80(E) of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“(E) A period of at least ~~two weeks~~ twenty‑two days must elapse between the date of the commission’s initial report of nominations to the General Assembly and the date the General Assembly conducts the election for these judgeships.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect and applies to elections taking place after July 1, 2021.

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