**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 7‑15‑325 SO AS TO PROVIDE THAT ANY QUALIFIED ELECTOR OF THIS STATE MAY VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT WITHOUT BEING REQUIRED TO PROVIDE AN EXCUSE, JUSTIFICATION, OR REASON, AND TO ESTABLISH A THIRTY‑DAY PERIOD DURING WHICH ALL QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THIS STATE MUST BE ALLOWED TO CAST AN IN‑PERSON ABSENTEE BALLOT WITHOUT BEING REQUIRED TO ASSERT, STATE, OFFER, OR PROVIDE AN EXCUSE, JUSTIFICATION, OR REASON; TO AMEND SECTION 7‑15‑340, RELATING TO THE FORM OF AN ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATION, SO AS TO ELIMINATE REFERENCES TO THE REASON FOR THE ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATION REQUEST; AND TO REPEAL SECTION 7‑15‑320 RELATING TO PERSONS QUALIFIED TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT.

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

SECTION 1. Article 5, Chapter 15, Title 7 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 7‑15‑325. (A) Any qualified elector of this State must be permitted to vote by absentee ballot in all elections without being required to assert, state, offer, or provide an excuse, justification, or reason.

(B) For a thirty‑day period, excluding Saturdays and Sundays, except as provided in subsection (C), and ending at 5:00 p.m. on the Saturday immediately prior to any election for which absentee voting is permitted, all qualified electors of this State must be allowed to cast an in‑person absentee ballot without being required to assert, state, offer, or provide an excuse, justification, or reason. Each county board of voter registration and elections must establish at least one in‑person absentee voting location and may establish up to six in‑person absentee voting locations. If the election for which absentee voting is permitted falls on a Saturday, then the last day for in‑person absentee voting is the Thursday immediately preceding the election.

(C) During the thirty‑day in‑person absentee voting period, excluding Saturdays and Sundays, provided for in this section, all in‑person absentee voting locations must be open each day from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. However, all in‑person absentee voting locations must be open from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on the Saturday immediately preceding the election.”

SECTION 2. Section 7‑15‑340 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 7‑15‑340. (A) The application required in Section 7‑15‑330 to be submitted to these election officials must be in a form prescribed and distributed by the State Election Commission; except ~~that persons listed in Section 7‑15‑320(2), (3), (6), and (10) may use~~ for those persons authorized to use the Standard Form 76, or any subsequent form replacing it, provided by the federal government as a simultaneous request for registration and an absentee ballot or a request for an absentee ballot if already registered.

(B) The application must contain the following information: name, registration certificate number, address, absentee address, election of ballot request, election date, runoff preference, party preference, ~~reason for request,~~ oath of voter, and voter’s signature.

(C) The oath must be as follows: ‘I do swear or affirm that I am a qualified elector, that I am entitled to vote in this election, and that I will not vote again during this election. The information above is true in all respects~~, and I hereby apply for an absentee ballot for the reason indicated above~~.’ Any person who fraudulently applies for an absentee ballot in violation of this section, upon conviction, must be punished in accordance with Section 7‑25‑20.”

SECTION 3. Section 7‑15‑320 of the 1976 Code is repealed.

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

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