

2011 -- H 6176

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LC02600
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2011

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS

Introduced By: Representatives Blazewski, Morgan, Chippendale, McLaughlin, and Bennett

Date Introduced: May 19, 2011

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 17 of the General Laws entitled "ELECTIONS" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 29

4 VOTER CHOICE ACT

5 **17-29-1. Short title.** -- This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Voter
6 Choice Act."

7 **17-29-2. Legislative declaration.** -- (a) The general assembly hereby finds and declares
8 that:

9 (1) Majority rule is a fundamental principle of representative democracy, and the state's
10 election laws should uphold and facilitate this principle.

11 (2) In an election where more than two (2) candidates are running for an office, the
12 candidate who receives a plurality of the votes may actually be opposed by the majority of voters.

13 (3) The state's current voting method limits voters' choices and contributes to lower voter
14 participation.

15 (4) It is in the public interest to examine Rhode Island's voting method and consider
16 comprehensive reforms that would expand the choices realistically available to voters, increase
17 participation, address the concerns of the major political parties, save money, and increase
18 accountability.

19 (b) The general assembly further finds and declares that instant runoff voting and other

1 advanced voting methods have the potential to:

2 (1) Expand the range of choices available to voters by allowing them to vote for
3 candidates of minor political parties or unaffiliated candidates without fear of giving an
4 advantage to the candidate they least prefer;

5 (2) Reduce both election administration costs and campaign expenditures by combining
6 primary and general elections; and

7 (3) Promote campaigns that are more positive and focused on issues because candidates
8 will seek to appeal to opponents' supporters as a second choice.

9 **17-29-3. Voter choice study commission - established - definitions.** -- (a) The voter
10 choice study commission is hereby established for the purpose of studying instant runoff voting
11 and other advanced voting methods.

12 (b) As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires, "Advanced voting
13 method" means a voting method that allows an elector to indicate a preference for more than one
14 candidate in an election and that determines the winner of the election by majority vote.
15 "Advanced voting method" includes, but is not limited to, instant runoff voting, approval voting,
16 range voting, and proportional voting.

17 (c) The voter choice study commission shall consist of thirteen (13) members selected as
18 follows:

19 (1) Seven (7) members to be appointed by the speaker of the house, no more than five (5)
20 of whom shall be from the same political party, and at least three (3) of whom shall be the clerk
21 of a city or town of this state;

22 (2) Six (6) members to be appointed by the president of the senate, no more than four (4)
23 of whom shall be from the same political party, at least two (2) of whom shall be the clerk of a
24 city or town of this state; and

25 (3) Provided, that all members of the study commission shall be registered voters of this
26 state at the time of their selection and at all times while they remain on said study group.

27 (d) Members of the voter choice study group shall be appointed no later than August 1,
28 2011.

29 (e) The voter choice study commission shall:

30 (1) Study advanced voting methods;

31 (2) Analyze the requirements for implementing advanced voting methods, including
32 public education, voting equipment and technology, ballot designs, the costs of conducting the
33 pilot project established by this chapter and using advanced voting methods in elections for state
34 and federal offices, and savings due to the elimination of primary elections;

1 (3) Determine the level of public support for a change in voting methods in the political
2 subdivisions selected to participate in the pilot project established by this chapter;

3 (4) Recommend one or more advanced voting methods to be designated as qualified
4 advanced voting methods pursuant to the provisions of this chapter;

5 (5) Review the experience of other states in conducting elections using advanced voting
6 methods;

7 (6) Recommend statutory changes to implement advanced voting methods in elections for
8 state and federal offices to be held in the state in 2014;

9 (7) Make recommendations on making all voting systems used in the state compatible
10 with advanced voting methods by 2014, including a review of the availability and costs of
11 necessary voting equipment;

12 (8) Make recommendations to the governing bodies and designated election officials of
13 political subdivisions of the state on preparing to conduct an election using an advanced voting
14 methods; and

15 (9) Consider changes to the state's statutes governing access to the ballot for presidential
16 candidates.

17 (f) The voter choice study commission shall present a report on its work to the general
18 assembly, the governor, and the secretary of state no later than January 4, 2012.

19 (g) The director of research of the legislative council and the director of the office of
20 legislative legal services shall provide staff assistance to the voter choice study commission.

21 (h) The members of the voter choice study commission shall serve without compensation;
22 except that the members shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance
23 of their duties.

24 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
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1 This act would establish a study commission to explore the possible use of advanced
2 voting methods for electing persons in this state. The act would define several forms of advanced
3 voting methods, which essentially use non-traditional forms of voting that seek to produce the
4 winner of an election by majority vote.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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