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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

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A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- CONDUCT OF ELECTION AND VOTING EQUIPMENT  
AND SUPPLIES

Introduced By: Senators DiPalma, Britto, Zurier, and F. Lombardi

Date Introduced: February 12, 2024

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 17-19-31 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-19 entitled "Conduct of  
2 Election and Voting Equipment, and Supplies" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-19-31. Irregular ballots.**

4 Ballots voted [for any office in which no eligible candidate appears on the ballot for that](#)  
5 [office, or in any other office](#) for any person whose name does not appear on the ballot as a  
6 nominated candidate for office [and who has been duly qualified under the requirements of § 17-](#)  
7 [14-18](#) are referred to in this section as "irregular ballots." In voting for presidential electors, a voter  
8 may vote an irregular ticket made up of the names of persons in nomination by different parties; or  
9 partly of names of persons in nomination and partly of names of persons not in nomination; or  
10 wholly of names of persons not in nomination by any party. Scanned images of the computer ballot  
11 containing the irregular ballot shall be stored digitally on physical electronic media in the optical-  
12 scan precinct-count unit. With that exception, no irregular ballot shall be voted for any person for  
13 any office whose name appears on the ballot as a nominated candidate for that office; [nor shall any](#)  
14 [irregular ballot be voted for any person who has not been duly qualified under the requirements of](#)  
15 [§ 17-14-18, unless said vote is cast for an office in which no eligible candidate appears on the ballot](#)  
16 [for that office;](#) any irregular ballot so voted shall not be counted. An irregular ballot must be cast  
17 in its appropriate place on the ballot, or it shall be void and not counted and no irregular ballots  
18 shall be counted at primaries; [provided, that in all elections, except for any declaration of intent of](#)

1 [write-in candidacy for any presidential preference primary or general election, irregular ballots](#)  
2 [shall not be required to be counted unless the total number of irregular ballots exceeds the margin](#)  
3 [of votes between the top two \(2\) vote-getters in the race for that office.](#) provided, [further](#) that at any  
4 presidential primary, irregular ballots shall be counted for those persons whose names have been  
5 written in for the office of president. At the close of the polls, irregular ballots shall be packaged  
6 according to § 17-19-33 and shall be immediately delivered to the local board of canvassers. The  
7 local board shall receive the tape from the optical precinct-count unit containing printed images of  
8 each written name on the irregular ballots, or the physical electronic media containing images of  
9 the irregular ballots and [shall only](#) record all write-in votes cast for [persons meeting the](#)  
10 [requirements of this section for](#) all federal, state, and local races listed on the tape. The local board  
11 shall notify the state board of the results through a procedure promulgated by the state board.

12 SECTION 2. Section 17-22-7 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-22 entitled "Tabulation  
13 and Certification of Returns by State Board" is hereby amended to read as follows:

14 **17-22-7. Books of record of votes — Contents.**

15 (a) The board shall keep separate books of record of the votes cast for the different classes  
16 of officers which it is its duty to count, canvass, and tabulate, as follows:

- 17 (1) A book of record of votes cast for electors of president and vice-president;  
18 (2) A book of record of votes cast for senators and representatives in congress;  
19 (3) A book of record of votes cast for general officers; and  
20 (4) A book of record of the votes cast for each class of officers that may by law  
21 subsequently be required to be counted, canvassed, and tabulated by the board.

22 (b) Each of the respective books shall contain:

- 23 (1) A record of the number of votes cast in each voting district for each candidate according  
24 to the counting, canvassing, and tabulating of the board;  
25 (2) The number cast in each voting district for each candidate according to the certificates  
26 of the moderators or wardens and clerks;  
27 (3) The total number cast for each candidate in each town and city according to the counting  
28 and to the certificates;  
29 (4) The total number cast for each candidate in the state or congressional district, as the  
30 case may be, according to the counting and the certificates;  
31 (5) A statement of which candidates are elected; and  
32 (6) Any other pertinent facts that the board deems proper.

33 (c) The board shall also keep a book of record of the votes cast for and against any  
34 proposition of amendment of the Constitution and a book of record of the votes cast for and against

1 all questions submitted to the electors of the state, with like detail as provided in this section in  
2 relation to votes cast for officers.

3 (d) Notwithstanding the above, the state board shall report all write-in votes received by  
4 persons qualifying as write-in candidates pursuant to the requirements of § 17-19-31 and, not  
5 otherwise qualifying to appear on the ballot ~~and receiving less than five (5) votes in a race, as a~~  
6 ~~composite total of all write in votes cast for said office.~~

7 SECTION 3. Chapter 17-14 of the General Laws entitled "Nomination of Party and  
8 Independent Candidates" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

9 **17-14-18. Declaration of intent of write-in candidacy.**

10 (a) No later than four o'clock (4:00) p.m. on the date of any presidential preference primary  
11 or general election or election regularly scheduled for a time other than the biennial general  
12 statewide election, each voter seeking to be a write-in candidate at the upcoming election shall, on  
13 a form that shall be provided by the secretary of state, file a declaration of the candidate's intent of  
14 write-in candidacy for a federal, state, or local office appearing on the ballot. The declaration of  
15 intent shall be filed with the secretary of state or local board, depending on the office being sought,  
16 as required for declarations of candidacy under § 17-14-1. No person shall be eligible to file a  
17 declaration of intent of write-in candidacy unless the person shall have been qualified, as of the  
18 declaration deadline set forth under § 17-14-1, to vote in the election within the district for the  
19 office which that person now seeks. The declaration of intent shall be signed by the candidate as  
20 the candidate's name appears on the voting list. The signature shall be accepted as valid if it is  
21 original and can be reasonably identified to be the name and signature of the voter it purports to be.  
22 A variation of the voter's signature by the insertion or omission of identifying titles or by the  
23 substitution of initials for the first or middle names of both shall not in itself be grounds for  
24 invalidation of the signature. The declaration shall also include the following information:

25 (1) The candidate's name as it appears on the voting list, subject to the same provisions as  
26 relate to the voter's signature on the declaration;

27 (2) The address as it appears on the voting list; provided that, an address which is  
28 substantially the same as the address on the voting list shall be valid;

29 (3) The office sought;

30 (4) The place and date of birth;

31 (5) The length of residence in the state and in the town or city where the candidate resides;

32 (6) A certification that the candidate is neither serving a sentence, including probation or  
33 parole, for which the candidate was imprisoned upon final conviction of a felony imposed on any  
34 date nor serving any sentence, whether incarcerated or suspended, on probation or parole, upon

1 final conviction of a felony committed after November 5, 1986;

2 (7) A certification that the candidate has not been lawfully adjudicated to be non compos  
3 mentis, of unsound mind;

4 (8) If a person is a candidate for a state or local office, a certification that the person has  
5 not within the preceding three (3) years served any sentence, incarcerated or suspended, on  
6 probation or parole, for a crime committed after November 5, 1986, upon a plea of nolo contendere  
7 or guilty or upon a conviction of a felony or for a misdemeanor for which a sentence of  
8 imprisonment for six (6) months or more, whether suspended or to be served as imposed.

9 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

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1           This act would require a write-in candidate to file a declaration of intent with the same  
2 office at which the declaration of candidacy would be filed, and require similar residency  
3 requirements for write-in candidates that exists for declared candidates and would require that local  
4 boards of canvassers and the state board of elections tally write-in votes in closely contested races  
5 for candidates who file the declaration of intent. Furthermore, write-ins votes would also be tallied  
6 in contests where no candidate is on the ballot for that contest and the entire set of scanned images  
7 containing all write-ins votes would be posted on the website of the state board.

8           This act would take effect upon passage.

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