

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2015 SESSION

CHAPTER 313

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-452, 24.2-465, 24.2-466, 24.2-612, 24.2-646.1, 24.2-702.1, 24.2-706, 24.2-707, and 24.2-712 of the Code of Virginia and to repeal § 24.2-702 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act; efficiencies reforms.

[H 2397]

Approved March 17, 2015

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-452, 24.2-465, 24.2-466, 24.2-612, 24.2-646.1, 24.2-702.1, 24.2-706, 24.2-707, and 24.2-712 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-452. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

1. "Covered voter" means:
 - a. A uniformed-service voter or an overseas voter who is registered to vote in this state;
 - b. A uniformed-service voter defined in subdivision 9 a whose voting residence is in this state and who otherwise satisfies this state's voter eligibility requirements, including subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700;
 - c. An overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, was last eligible to vote in this state and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state's voter eligibility requirements;
 - d. An overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, would have been last eligible to vote in this state had the voter then been of voting age and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state's voter eligibility requirements; or
 - e. An overseas voter who was born outside the United States, is not described in subdivision c or d, and, except for a state residency requirement, otherwise satisfies this state's voter eligibility requirements, if:
 - (1) The last place where a parent or legal guardian of the voter was, or under this chapter would have been, eligible to vote before leaving the United States is within this state; and
 - (2) The voter has not previously registered to vote in any other state.
2. "Dependent" means an individual recognized as a dependent by a uniformed service.
3. "Federal postcard application" means the application prescribed under § 101(b)(2) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 52 U.S.C. § 20301(b)(2).
4. "Federal write-in absentee ballot" means the ballot described in § 103 of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 52 U.S.C. § 20303, that may be used in all elections in which the voter is eligible to vote as provided in § 24.2-702.1.
5. "Military-overseas ballot" means:
 - a. A federal write-in absentee ballot;
 - b. A ballot specifically prepared or distributed for use by a covered voter in accordance with this title, ~~including an early ballot authorized in § 24.2-702~~; or
 - c. A ballot cast by a covered voter in accordance with this title.
6. "Overseas voter" means a United States citizen who is outside the United States.
7. "State" means a state of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, or any territory or insular possession subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.
8. "Uniformed service" means:
 - a. Active and reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States;
 - b. The Merchant Marine, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, or the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States; or
 - c. The Virginia National Guard.
9. "Uniformed-service voter" means an individual who is qualified to vote and is:
 - a. A member of the active or reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States who is on active duty;
 - b. A member of the Merchant Marine, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, or the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States;
 - c. A member on activated status of the National Guard; or
 - d. A spouse or dependent of a member referred to in this definition.
10. "United States," used in the territorial sense, means the several states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, and any territory or insular possession subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

§ 24.2-465. Publication of election notice.

At least 100 days before a regularly scheduled election and as soon as practicable before an election

not regularly scheduled, ~~an official in each jurisdiction charged with printing and distributing ballots and balloting materials~~ the *Department of Elections* shall make election information available for ~~that~~ *each* jurisdiction, to be used in conjunction with a federal write-in absentee ballot. The election notice must contain a list of all of the ballot measures and federal, state, and local offices that as of that date ~~the official expects are expected~~ to be on the ballot on the date of the election. The notice also must contain, or enable access to, specific instructions for how a voter is to indicate on the federal write-in absentee ballot the voter's choice for each office to be filled and for each ballot measure to be contested. Specific instructions may include a website address or a telephone number.

§ 24.2-466. Sending and updating notices.

A. A covered voter may request *and upon such request the Department of Elections shall provide a copy of an election notice without cost to the voter.* The ~~official charged with preparing the election notice~~ *Department of Elections* shall send the notice to the voter *using the method requested and to the address provided by the voter.*

B. As soon as ballot styles are verified ~~by the State Board~~ pursuant to § 24.2-612 and not later than the date ballots are required to be transmitted to voters under §§ 24.2-460 and 24.2-612, the ~~official charged with preparing the election notice under § 24.2-465~~ *Department of Elections* shall update the notice with the certified candidates for each office and ballot measure questions and make the updated notice publicly available.

C. A local election jurisdiction that maintains a website shall make the election notice prepared under § 24.2-465 and updated versions of the election notice regularly available on the website.

§ 24.2-612. List of offices and candidates filed with Department of Elections and checked for accuracy; when ballots printed; number required.

Immediately after the expiration of the time provided by law for a candidate for any office to qualify to have his name printed on the official ballot and prior to printing the ballots for an election, each electoral board shall forward to the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* a list of the county, city, or town offices to be filled at the election and the names of all candidates who have filed for each office. In addition, each electoral board shall forward the name of any candidate who failed to qualify with the reason for his disqualification. On that same day, the electoral board shall also provide a copy of the notice to each disqualified candidate. The notice shall be sent by email or regular mail to the address on the candidate's certificate of candidate qualification, and such notice shall be deemed sufficient. The ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* shall promptly advise the electoral board of the accuracy of the list. The failure of any electoral board to send the list to the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* for verification shall not invalidate any election.

Each electoral board shall have printed the number of ballots it determines will be sufficient to conduct the election.

Notwithstanding any other provisions of this title, the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* may print or otherwise provide ~~(i) one statewide paper ballot style for each paper ballot style in use for presidential and vice-presidential electors for use only by persons eligible to vote for those offices only under § 24.2-402 or clause (iii) or (v) of subsection B of § 24.2-416.1 or (ii) one statewide paper ballot style for each paper ballot style in use for Governor, Lieutenant Governor or Attorney General only for use as the early absentee ballot specified in § 24.2-702 only for federal elections under § 24.2-453.~~ The ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* may apportion or authorize the printer or vendor to apportion the costs for these ballots among the localities based on the number of ballots ordered. Any printer employed by the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* shall execute the statement required by § 24.2-616. The ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* shall designate a representative to be present at the printing of such ballots and deliver them to the appropriate electoral boards pursuant to § 24.2-617. Upon receipt of such paper ballots, the electoral board shall affix its seal. Thereafter, such ballots shall be handled and accounted for, and the votes counted as the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* shall specifically direct.

The electoral board shall make printed ballots available for absentee voting not later than 45 days prior to any election or within three business days of the receipt of a properly completed absentee ballot application, whichever is later. In the case of a special election, excluding for federal offices, if time is insufficient to meet the applicable deadline established herein, then the electoral board shall make printed ballots available as soon after the deadline as possible. For the purposes of this chapter, making printed ballots available includes mailing of such ballots or electronic transmission of such ballots pursuant to § 24.2-706 to a qualified absentee voter who is eligible for an absentee ballot under subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700. Not later than five days after absentee ballots are made available, each electoral board shall report to the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections*, in writing on a form approved by the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections*, whether it has complied with the applicable deadline.

Only the names of candidates for offices to be voted on in a particular election district shall be printed on the ballots for that election district.

The electoral boards shall send to the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* a statement of the number of ballots ordered to be printed, proofs of each printed ballot for verification, and copies of each final ballot. If the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* finds that, in its opinion, the number of ballots

ordered to be printed by any local electoral board is not sufficient, it may direct the local board to order the printing of a reasonable number of additional ballots.

§ 24.2-646.1. Permitted use of paper ballots.

The official paper ballot shall be used by a voter to cast his vote only in one of the following circumstances:

1. The official paper ballot is the only ballot in use in the precinct.
2. The official paper ballot is used by voters voting outside the polling place pursuant to § 24.2-649.
3. The voter is casting a provisional ballot.
4. The voter is provided an official paper ballot or copy thereof pursuant to § 24.2-642 when voting equipment is inoperable or otherwise unavailable.
5. The official absentee paper ballot voted in accordance with (§ 24.2-700 et seq.).
6. The voter is provided an official paper ballot for a presidential election pursuant to § 24.2-402 *or for federal elections pursuant to § 24.2-453.*

§ 24.2-702.1. Federal write-in absentee ballots.

A. Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, a qualified absentee voter who is eligible for an absentee ballot under subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700 may use a federal write-in absentee ballot in any election. Such ballot shall be submitted and processed in the manner provided by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.) and this article.

B. Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, a federal write-in absentee ballot submitted pursuant to subsection A shall be considered valid for purposes of simultaneously satisfying both an absentee ballot application and a completed absentee ballot, provided that the ballot is received no later than the deadline for the return of absentee ballots as provided in § 24.2-709 for the election in which the voter offers to vote, and the application contains the following information: (i) the voter's signature; however, if the voter is unable to sign, the person assisting the voter will note this fact in the voter signature box; (ii) the voter's printed name; (iii) the county or city in which he is registered and offers to vote; (iv) the residence address at which he is registered to vote; (v) his current military or overseas address; and (vi) the signature of a witness who shall sign the same application.

C. This section shall not be construed to require that an absentee ballot be sent to the absentee voter on receipt of a federal write-in absentee ballot unless the voter has also submitted an absentee ballot application pursuant to § 24.2-701, 24.2-702, or 24.2-703.

§ 24.2-706. Duty of general registrar and electoral board on receipt of application; statement of voter.

On receipt of an application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar shall enroll the name and address of each registered applicant on an absentee voter applicant list that shall be maintained in the office of the general registrar with a file of the applications of the listed applicants. The list shall be available for inspection and copying and the applications shall be available for inspection only by any registered voter during regular office hours. Upon request and for a reasonable fee, the ~~State Board~~ *Department* of Elections shall provide an electronic copy of the absentee voter applicant list to any political party or candidate. Such list shall be used only for campaign and political purposes. Any list made available for inspection and copying under this section shall contain the post office box address in lieu of the residence street address for any individual who has furnished at the time of registration or subsequently, in addition to his street address, a post office box address pursuant to subsection B of § 24.2-418.

No list or application containing an individual's social security number, or any part thereof, or the individual's day and month of birth, shall be made available for inspection or copying by anyone. The ~~State Board~~ *Department* of Elections shall prescribe procedures for local electoral boards and general registrars to make the information in the lists and applications available in a manner that does not reveal social security numbers or parts thereof, or an individual's day and month of birth.

The completion and timely delivery of an application for an absentee ballot shall be construed to be an offer by the applicant to vote in the election.

The general registrar shall note on each application received whether the applicant is or is not a registered voter and notify the secretary of the electoral board. In reviewing the application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar and electoral board shall not reject the application of any individual because of an error or omission on any record or paper relating to the application, if such error or omission is not material in determining whether such individual is qualified to vote absentee.

If the application has been properly completed and signed and the applicant is a registered voter of the precinct in which he offers to vote, the electoral board shall, at the time when the printed ballots for the election are available, send by the deadline set out in § 24.2-612, obtaining a certificate *or other evidence* of either first-class or expedited mailing or delivery from the United States Postal Service or other commercial delivery provider, or deliver to him in person in the office of the secretary or registrar, the following items and nothing else:

1. An envelope containing the folded ballot, sealed and marked "Ballot within. Do not open except in presence of a witness."
2. An envelope, with printing only on the flap side, for resealing the marked ballot, on which

envelope is printed the following:

"Statement of Voter."

"I do hereby state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that my FULL NAME is _____ (last, first, middle); that I am now or have been at some time since last November's general election a legal resident of _____ (STATE YOUR LEGAL RESIDENCE IN VIRGINIA including the house number, street name or rural route address, city, zip code); that I received the enclosed ballot(s) upon application to the registrar of such county or city; that I opened the envelope marked 'ballot within' and marked the ballot(s) in the presence of the witness, without assistance or knowledge on the part of anyone as to the manner in which I marked it (or I am returning the form required to report how I was assisted); that I then sealed the ballot(s) in this envelope; and that I have not voted and will not vote in this election at any other time or place.

Signature of Voter _____

Date _____

Signature of witness _____"

For elections held after January 1, 2004, instead of the envelope containing the above oath, an envelope containing the standard oath prescribed by the presidential designee under § 101(b)(7) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.) shall be sent to voters who are qualified to vote absentee under that Act.

3. A properly addressed envelope for the return of the ballot to the electoral board by mail or by the applicant in person.

4. Printed instructions for completing the ballot and statement on the envelope and returning the ballot.

For federal elections held after January 1, 2004, for any voter who is required by subparagraph (b) of 52 U.S.C. § 21083 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to show identification the first time the voter votes in a federal election in the state, the printed instructions shall direct the voter to submit with his ballot (i) a copy of a current and valid photo identification or (ii) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter. Such individual who desires to vote by mail but who does not submit one of the forms of identification specified in this paragraph may cast such ballot by mail and the ballot shall be counted as a provisional ballot under the provisions of § 24.2-653. The ~~State Board~~ Department of Elections shall provide instructions to the electoral boards for the handling and counting of such provisional ballots pursuant to subsection B of § 24.2-653 and this section.

5. For any voter entitled to vote absentee under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.), information provided by the ~~State Board~~ Department of Elections specific to the voting rights and responsibilities for such citizens, or information provided by the registrar specific to the status of the voter registration and absentee ballot application of such voter, may be included.

The envelopes and instructions shall be in the form prescribed by the ~~State Board~~ Department of Elections.

If the applicant makes his application to vote in person under § 24.2-701 at a time when the printed ballots for the election are available, the general registrar or the secretary of the electoral board, on the determination of the qualifications of the applicant to vote, shall provide to the applicant the items set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4, and no item shall be removed by the applicant from the office of the general registrar or the secretary of the electoral board. On the request of the applicant, made no later than 5:00 p.m. on the seventh day prior to the election in which the applicant offers to vote, the general registrar or the secretary may send the items set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4 to the applicant by mail, obtaining a certificate *or other evidence* of mailing.

If the applicant states as the reason for his absence on election day any of the reasons set forth in subdivision 2 of § 24.2-700, the electoral board, at the time when the printed ballots for the election are available, shall mail by the deadline set forth in § 24.2-612 or deliver in person to the applicant in the office of the secretary or general registrar the items as set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4 and, if necessary, an application for registration. A certificate *or other evidence* of mailing shall not be required. The electoral board, at the time when the printed ballots for the election are available, shall send by the deadline set forth in § 24.2-612 the blank ballot, the form for the envelope for returning the marked ballot, and instructions to the voter by electronic transmission if the voter so requests. The voted ballot shall be returned to the electoral board as otherwise required by this chapter.

When the statement prescribed in subdivision 2 has been properly completed and signed by the registered voter and witnessed, his ballot shall not be subject to challenge pursuant to § 24.2-651.

The circuit courts shall have jurisdiction to issue an injunction to enforce the provisions of this section upon the application of (i) any aggrieved voter, (ii) any candidate in an election district in whole or in part in the court's jurisdiction where a violation of this section has occurred, or is likely to occur, or (iii) the campaign committee or the appropriate district political party chairman of such candidate. Any person who fails to discharge his duty as provided in this section through willful neglect of duty and with malicious intent shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor as provided in subsection A of

§ 24.2-1001.

§ 24.2-707. How ballots marked and returned by mail; cast in person; cast on voting equipment.

On receipt of a mailed absentee ballot, the voter shall, in the presence of a witness, (i) open the sealed envelope marked "ballot within" and (ii) mark and refold the ballot, as provided in §§ 24.2-644 and 24.2-646 without assistance and without making known how he marked the ballot, except as provided by § 24.2-704.

After the voter has marked his absentee ballot, he shall (a) enclose the ballot in the envelope provided for that purpose, (b) seal the envelope, (c) fill in and sign the statement printed on the back of the envelope in the presence of a witness, who shall sign the same envelope, (d) enclose the ballot envelope and any required assistance form within the envelope directed to the electoral board, and (e) seal that envelope and mail it to the office of the electoral board or deliver it personally to the electoral board or the general registrar. A voter's failure to provide in the statement on the back of the envelope his full middle name or his middle initial shall not be a material omission, rendering his ballot void, unless the voter failed to provide in the statement on the back of the envelope his full first and last name. A voter's failure to provide the date, or any part of the date, including the year, on which he signed the statement printed on the back of the envelope shall not be considered a material omission and shall not render his ballot void. For purposes of this chapter, "mail" shall include delivery by a commercial delivery service, but shall not include delivery by a personal courier service or another individual except as provided by §§ 24.2-703.2 and 24.2-705.

An applicant who makes his application to vote in person at a time when the printed ballots for the election are available shall follow the same procedure set forth above except that he may complete the procedure in person in the office of the general registrar or secretary of the electoral board, or at another location or locations in the county or city approved by the electoral board, before a registrar or a member of the electoral board, or, if a ballot is cast at that time, before the officers of election appointed by the electoral board. Any such location shall be in a public building owned or leased by the city, the county, or a town within the county, with adequate facilities for the protection of all records concerning the absentee voters, the absentee ballots, both voted and unvoted, and any voting equipment in use at the location. Such location may be in a facility owned or leased by the Commonwealth and used as a location for Department of Motor Vehicles facilities and for an office of the general registrar. Such location shall be deemed the equivalent of the office of the general registrar or secretary of the electoral board for the purpose of completing the application for an absentee ballot in person pursuant to §§ 24.2-701 and 24.2-706. On the request of the applicant, made no later than 5:00 p.m. on the seventh day prior to the election in which the applicant offers to vote, the general registrar or the secretary may send the items set forth in subdivisions 1 through 4 of § 24.2-706 to the applicant by mail, obtaining a certificate or other evidence of mailing.

Failure to follow the procedures set forth above shall render the applicant's ballot void.

The electoral board of any county or city using a central absentee voting precinct may provide for the casting of absentee ballots on voting equipment prior to election day by applicants who are voting in person. The ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* shall prescribe procedures for the use of voting equipment. The procedures shall provide for the casting of absentee ballots prior to election day by in-person applicants on voting equipment which has been certified, and is currently approved, by the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections*. The procedures shall be applicable and uniformly applied by the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* to all jurisdictions using comparable voting equipment. At least two officers of election, one representing each political party, shall be present during all hours that absentee voting is available at any location at which absentee ballots are cast prior to election day.

The requirement that officers of election shall be present if ballots are cast on voting equipment prior to election day shall not be applicable when the voting equipment is located in the office of the general registrar or secretary of the electoral board and the general registrar, an assistant registrar, or the secretary of the electoral board is present.

§ 24.2-712. Central absentee voter precincts; counting ballots.

A. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the governing body of each county or city may establish one or more central absentee voter precincts in the courthouse or other public buildings for the purpose of receiving, counting, and recording absentee ballots cast in the county or city. The decision to establish any absentee voter precinct shall be made by the governing body by ordinance; the ordinance shall state for which elections the precinct shall be used. The decision to abolish any absentee voter precinct shall be made by the governing body by ordinance. Immediate notification of either decision shall be sent to the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections* and the electoral board.

B. Each central absentee voter precinct shall have at least three officers of election as provided for other precincts. The number of officers shall be determined by the electoral board.

C. If any voter brings an unmarked ballot to the central absentee voter precinct on the day of the election, he shall be allowed to vote it. If any voter brings an unmarked ballot to the electoral board on or before the day of the election, he shall be allowed to vote it, and his ballot shall be delivered to the absentee voter precinct pursuant to § 24.2-710.

The officers at the absentee voter precinct shall determine any appeal by any other voter whose name appears on the absentee voter applicant list and who offers to vote in person. If the officers at the absentee voter precinct produce records showing the receipt of his application and the certificate *or other evidence* of mailing for the ballot, they shall deny his appeal. If the officers cannot produce such records, the voter shall be allowed to vote in person at the absentee voter precinct and have his vote counted with other absentee votes. If the voter's appeal is denied, the provisions of § 24.2-708 shall be applicable, and the officers shall advise the voter that he may vote on presentation of a statement signed by him that he has not received an absentee ballot and subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016.

D. Absentee ballots may be processed as required by § 24.2-711 by the officers of election at the central absentee voter precinct prior to the closing of the polls but the ballot container shall not be opened and the counting of ballots shall not begin prior to that time. In the case of machine-readable ballots, the ballot container may be opened and the absentee ballots may be inserted in the counting machines prior to the closing of the polls in accordance with procedures prescribed by the ~~State Board~~ *Department of Elections*, including procedures to preserve ballot secrecy, but no ballot count totals shall be initiated prior to that time.

As soon as the polls are closed in the county or city the officers of election at the central absentee voter precinct shall proceed promptly to ascertain and record the vote given by absentee ballot and report the results in the manner provided for counting and reporting ballots generally in Article 4 (§ 24.2-643 et seq.) of Chapter 6.

E. The electoral board may provide that the officers of election for a central absentee voter precinct may be assigned to work all or a portion of the time that the precinct is open on election day subject to the following conditions:

1. The chief officer and the assistant chief officer, appointed pursuant to § 24.2-115 to represent the two political parties, are on duty at all times; and
2. No officer, political party representative, or other candidate representative shall leave the precinct after any ballots have been counted until the polls are closed and the count for the precinct is completed and reported.

F. The electoral board, with the written agreement of the general registrar, may provide that the central absentee voter precinct will open after 6:00 a.m. on the day of the election provided that the office of the general registrar will be open for the receipt of absentee ballots until the central absentee voter precinct is open and that the officers of election for the central absentee voter precinct obtain the absentee ballots returned to the general registrar's office for the purpose of counting the absentee ballots at the central absentee voter precinct and provided further that the central absentee voter precinct is the same location as the office of the general registrar.

2. That § 24.2-702 of the Code of Virginia is repealed.