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SENATE BILL NO. 84

Offered January 13, 2016

Prefiled December 21, 2015

A BILL to amend and reenact § 24.2-706 of the Code of Virginia, relating to absentee voting; postage prepaid on return envelope.

Patrons—Favola; Delegate: Kory

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 24.2-706 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-706. Duty of general registrar 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 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 Department of Elections shall prescribe procedures for 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. In reviewing the application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar 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 general registrar 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 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

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59 envelope containing the standard oath prescribed by the presidential designee under § 101(b)(7) of the
60 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.) shall be sent to
61 voters who are qualified to vote absentee under that Act.

62 3. A properly addressed envelope *with postage prepaid* for the return of the ballot to the general
63 registrar by mail or by the applicant in person.

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

66 For federal elections held after January 1, 2004, for any voter who is required by subparagraph (b) of
67 52 U.S.C. § 21083 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to show identification the first time the voter
68 votes in a federal election in the state, the printed instructions shall direct the voter to submit with his
69 ballot (i) a copy of a current and valid photo identification or (ii) a copy of a current utility bill, bank
70 statement, government check, paycheck or other government document that shows the name and address
71 of the voter. Such individual who desires to vote by mail but who does not submit one of the forms of
72 identification specified in this paragraph may cast such ballot by mail and the ballot shall be counted as
73 a provisional ballot under the provisions of § 24.2-653. The Department of Elections shall provide
74 instructions to the electoral boards for the handling and counting of such provisional ballots pursuant to
75 subsection B of § 24.2-653 and this section.

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

80 The envelopes and instructions shall be in the form prescribed by the Department of Elections.

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

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

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

99 The circuit courts shall have jurisdiction to issue an injunction to enforce the provisions of this
100 section upon the application of (i) any aggrieved voter, (ii) any candidate in an election district in whole
101 or in part in the court's jurisdiction where a violation of this section has occurred, or is likely to occur,
102 or (iii) the campaign committee or the appropriate district political party chairman of such candidate.
103 Any person who fails to discharge his duty as provided in this section through willful neglect of duty
104 and with malicious intent shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor as provided in subsection A of
105 § 24.2-1001.