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**HOUSE BILL NO. 1658**

Offered January 9, 2019

Prefiled November 30, 2018

*A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 4 of Chapter 6 of Title 24.2 a section numbered 24.2-642.1, relating to conduct of elections; vote by mail; pilot program.*

Patrons—Rodman, Ayala, Bagby, Bourne, Carr, Carter, Delaney, Gooditis, Guzman, Hayes, Hope, Hurst, Keam, Kory, Krizek, Levine, Lindsey, McQuinn, Mullin, Plum, Rasoul, Reid, Roem, Simon and Sullivan

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 4 of Chapter 6 of Title 24.2 a section numbered 24.2-642.1 as follows:**

**§ 24.2-642.1. Vote by mail; pilot program.**

*A. The Department of Elections shall develop a vote-by-mail pilot program (the pilot program) in order to study the efficacy and potential cost savings of conducting elections by mail in the Commonwealth and the effects of such a system on voter participation. In developing the pilot program, the Department shall establish guidelines for the establishment and operation of drop-off locations where a voter may return his marked ballot, the operation of polling places on election day, and the operation of the office of the general registrar for purposes of receiving marked ballots delivered in person.*

*Any county or city may participate in the pilot program by submitting an application to the Department for approval by the State Board. Such application shall include the locality's plan for the establishment of drop-off locations.*

*A county or city approved by the State Board for participation in the pilot program shall conduct by mail all elections held in the locality while the locality is a participant in the pilot program.*

*B. In a county or city participating in the pilot program, every registered voter in the locality shall be mailed a ballot for every election held in the locality during the locality's participation in the pilot program. The ballot and a mailed ballot packet shall be mailed to the address listed in the voter's registration record. Ballots may be returned by the voters by (i) mailing the ballot to the office of the general registrar, (ii) delivering the ballot in person to the office of the general registrar, or (iii) depositing the ballot at a drop-off location.*

*C. The Department shall develop administrative procedures to be followed by participating counties or cities for (i) the mailing of ballots to the voters, including the contents of the mailed ballot packet and the deadlines for mailing the ballots; (ii) the secure receipt and collection of mailed ballots; and (iii) the processing and counting of ballots.*

*D. The electoral board of any county or city participating in the pilot program shall provide a report on the program in the locality, including the numbers of ballots returned and the method by which the ballots were returned, to the State Board by December 1 of each year of its participation. The State Board shall provide guidance on any additional information to be provided and the form in which it is to be provided.*

**2. That the provisions of this act shall expire on December 31, 2022.**

**3. That the State Board of Elections, on or before the first day of the 2023 Regular Session of the General Assembly, shall submit a report to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the House and Senate Committees on Privileges and Elections on the implementation of the vote-by-mail pilot program in participating localities. The report shall include a recommendation to the General Assembly regarding whether to conduct all elections in the Commonwealth by mail on a permanent, statewide basis. If making a recommendation to conduct all elections in the Commonwealth by mail on a permanent, statewide basis, the report shall also include recommendations for implementing legislation.**

INTRODUCED

HB1658