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HOUSE BILL NO. 2115

Offered January 13, 2021

Prefiled January 12, 2021

A BILL to amend and reenact § 24.2-709 of the Code of Virginia, relating to absentee voting; definition of postmark; legibility requirement.

Patrons—Ransone, Batten, Brewer, Byron, Campbell, R.R., Cole, M.L., Fowler, Marshall, Orrock, Walker, Webert, Wiley, Wilt, Wright and Wyatt

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 24.2-709 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 24.2-709. Ballot to be returned in manner prescribed by law.**

A. Any ballot returned to the office of the general registrar in any manner except as prescribed by law shall be void. Absentee ballots shall be returned to the general registrar before the closing of the polls. The registrar receiving the ballot shall (i) seal the ballot in an envelope with the statement or declaration of the voter, or both, attached to the outside and (ii) mark on each envelope the date, time, and manner of delivery. No returned absentee ballot shall be deemed void because the inner envelope containing the voted ballot is imperfectly sealed so long as the outside envelope containing the ballot envelope is sealed.

B. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection A, any absentee ballot (i) returned to the general registrar after the closing of the polls on election day but before noon on the third day after the election and (ii) *legibly* postmarked on or before the date of the election shall be counted pursuant to the procedures set forth in this chapter if the voter is found entitled to vote. For purposes of this subsection, a "postmark ~~shall include~~" means (a) an official United States Postal Service imprint indicating the date of mailing or any other official indicia of ~~confirmation of mailing~~ by the United States Postal Service used to identify the date of mailing or ~~other postal~~ or (b) the mailing confirmation data of any commercial delivery service.

C. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection A, any absentee ballot (i) received after the close of the polls on any election day, (ii) received before 5:00 p.m. on the second business day before the State Board meets to ascertain the results of the election pursuant to this title, (iii) requested on or before but not sent by the deadline for making absentee ballots available under § 24.2-612, and (iv) cast by a covered voter, as defined in § 24.2-452, shall be counted pursuant to the procedures set forth in this chapter if the voter is found entitled to vote. The electoral board shall prepare an amended certified abstract, which shall include the results of such ballots, and shall deliver such abstract to the State Board by the business day prior to its meeting pursuant to this title, and shall deliver a copy of such abstract to the general registrar to be available for inspection when his office is open for business.

D. Notwithstanding the provisions of clause (i) of subsection B of § 24.2-427, an absentee ballot returned by a voter in compliance with § 24.2-707 and this section who dies prior to the counting of absentee ballots on election day shall be counted pursuant to the procedures set forth in this chapter if the voter is found to have been entitled to vote at the time that he returned the ballot.

INTRODUCED

HB2115