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**SENATE BILL NO. 165**

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 7, 2024

*A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-506 and 24.2-521 of the Code of Virginia, relating to elections; candidates for office; petition of qualified voters; start date.*

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Patron—Reeves

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Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

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

**1. That §§ 24.2-506 and 24.2-521 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 24.2-506. Petition of qualified voters required; number of signatures required; certain towns excepted.**

A. The name of any candidate for any office, other than a party nominee, shall not be printed upon any official ballots provided for the election unless he shall file along with his declaration of candidacy a petition therefor, on a form prescribed by the State Board, signed by the number of qualified voters specified in this subsection *on and after* January 1 of the year in which the *general* election is held, *or on and after the day on which the writ of election is issued in the case of a special election*, and listing the residence address of each such voter. Each signature on the petition shall have been witnessed by a person who is not a minor or a felon whose voting rights have not been restored and whose affidavit to that effect appears on each page of the petition. Each such person circulating a petition who is not a legal resident of the Commonwealth shall sign a statement on the affidavit that he consents to the jurisdiction of the courts of Virginia in resolving any disputes concerning the circulation of petitions, or signatures contained therein, by that person. The signatures of qualified voters collected by a nonresident petition circulator who fails to sign such statement, or who later fails to appear or produce documents when properly served with a subpoena to do so, shall not be counted towards the minimum number of signatures required pursuant to this subsection.

Each voter signing the petition may provide on the petition the last four digits of his social security number, if any; however, noncompliance with this requirement shall not be cause to invalidate the voter's signature on the petition.

The minimum number of signatures of qualified voters required for candidate petitions shall be as follows:

1. For a candidate for the United States Senate, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, or Attorney General, 10,000 signatures, including the signatures of at least 400 qualified voters from each congressional district in the Commonwealth;

2. For a candidate for the United States House of Representatives, 1,000 signatures;

3. For a candidate for the Senate of Virginia, 250 signatures;

4. For a candidate for the House of Delegates or for a constitutional office, 125 signatures;

5. For a candidate for membership on the governing body or elected school board of any county or city, 125 signatures; or if from an election district not at large containing 1,000 or fewer registered voters, 50 signatures;

6. For a candidate for membership on the governing body or elected school board of any town that has more than 3,500 registered voters, 125 signatures; or if from a ward or other district not at large, 25 signatures;

7. For a candidate for membership on the governing body or elected school board of any town that has at least 1,500 but not more than 3,500 registered voters, 50 signatures; or if from a ward or other district not at large, 25 signatures;

8. For a candidate for membership on the governing body or elected school board of any town that has fewer than 1,500 registered voters, no petition shall be required;

9. For a candidate for director of a soil and water conservation district created pursuant to Article 3 (§ 10.1-506 et seq.) of Chapter 5 of Title 10.1, 25 signatures; and

10. For any other candidate, 50 signatures.

B. The State Board shall approve uniform standards by which petitions filed by a candidate for office, other than a party nominee, are reviewed to determine if the petitions contain sufficient signatures of qualified voters as required in subsection A.

The State Board of Elections, on or before January 1, 2020, shall revise its processes and associated regulations for reviewing and processing candidate petitions. Such revisions shall provide a process for checking petition signatures that includes a method for determining if a petition signature belongs to an

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individual whose prior registration has been canceled and the reason for such cancellation. The process shall provide for the tracking of such information associated with each petition. The process shall provide for the escalation of cases of suspected fraud to the electoral board, the State Board, or the office of the attorney for the Commonwealth, as appropriate.

C. If a candidate, other than a party nominee, does not qualify to have his name appear on the ballot by reason of the candidate's filed petition not containing the minimum number of signatures of qualified voters for the office sought, the candidate may appeal that determination within five calendar days of the issuance of the notice of disqualification pursuant to § 24.2-612 or notice from the State Board that the candidate did not meet the requirements to have his name appear on the ballot.

Appeals made by candidates for a county, city, or town office shall be filed with the electoral board. Appeals made by candidates for all other offices shall be filed with the State Board. The appeal shall be heard by the State Board or the electoral board, as appropriate, within five business days of its filing. The electoral board shall notify the State Board of any appeal that is filed with the electoral board.

The State Board shall develop procedures for the conduct of such an appeal. The consideration on appeal shall be limited to whether or not the signatures on the petitions that were filed were reasonably rejected according to the requirements of this title and the uniform standards approved by the State Board for the review of petitions. Immediately after the conclusion of the appeal hearing, the entity conducting the appeal shall notify the candidate and, if applicable, the State Board, of its decision in writing. The decision on appeal shall be final and not subject to further appeal.

**§ 24.2-521. Petition required to accompany declaration; number of signatures required.**

A. A candidate for nomination by primary for any office shall be required to file with his declaration of candidacy a petition for his name to be printed on the official primary ballot, on a form prescribed by the State Board, signed by the number of qualified voters specified in this section *on and* after January 1 of the year in which the election is held ~~or before or after said date in the case of a March primary~~, and listing the residence address of each such voter. Each signature on the petition shall have been witnessed by a person who is not a minor or a felon whose voting rights have not been restored and whose affidavit to that effect appears on each page of the petition. Each such person circulating a petition who is not a legal resident of the Commonwealth shall sign a statement on the affidavit that he consents to the jurisdiction of the courts of Virginia in resolving any disputes concerning the circulation of petitions, or signatures contained therein, by that person. The signatures of qualified voters collected by a nonresident petition circulator who fails to sign such statement, or who later fails to appear or produce documents when properly served with a subpoena to do so, shall not be counted towards the minimum number of signatures required pursuant to subsection B.

Each voter signing the petition may provide on the petition the last four digits of his social security number, if any; however, noncompliance with this requirement shall not be cause to invalidate the voter's signature on the petition.

B. The minimum number of signatures of qualified voters required for primary candidate petitions shall be as follows:

1. For a candidate for the United States Senate, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, or Attorney General, 10,000 signatures, including the signatures of at least 400 qualified voters from each congressional district in the Commonwealth;

2. For a candidate for the United States House of Representatives, 1,000 signatures;

3. For a candidate for the Senate of Virginia, 250 signatures;

4. For a candidate for the House of Delegates or for a constitutional office, 125 signatures;

5. For a candidate for membership on the governing body of any county or city, 125 signatures; or if from an election district not at large containing 1,000 or fewer registered voters, 50 signatures;

6. For a candidate for membership on the governing body of any town that has more than 3,500 registered voters, 125 signatures; or if from a ward or other district not at large, 25 signatures;

7. For a candidate for membership on the governing body of any town that has at least 1,500 but not more than 3,500 registered voters, 50 signatures; or if from a ward or other district not at large, 25 signatures;

8. For a candidate for membership on the governing body of any town that has fewer than 1,500 registered voters, no petition shall be required; and

9. For any other candidate, 50 signatures.