

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1997 SESSION

CHAPTER 539

An Act to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-412 and 24.2-705 of the Code of Virginia and to repeal § 24.2-421 of the Code of Virginia, relating to locations and times for voter registration; registration of homebound voters; emergency absentee voting provisions.

[H 1977]

Approved March 19, 1997

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-412 and 24.2-705 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-412. Other locations and times for voter registration.

A. In addition to voter registration locations provided for in §§ 24.2-411, 24.2-411.1, and 24.2-411.2, opportunities for voter registration may be provided at other agency offices, business offices, establishments and occasional sites open to the general public, and shall be provided as required by this section. Voter registration shall be conducted only in public places open to the general public and at preannounced hours. Assistant registrars should serve during such hours and at such places. The conduct of voter registration by the general registrar or an assistant registrar in public places at preannounced hours shall not be deemed solicitation of registration.

B. The general registrar is authorized to set within his jurisdiction ongoing locations and times for registration in local or state government agency offices or in businesses or other establishments open to the general public, subject to the approval of, and pursuant to an agreement with, the head of the government agency, the owner or manager of the business or establishment, or the designee of either. The agreement shall provide for the appointment of employees of the agency, business, or establishment to serve as assistant registrars and shall be in writing and approved by the local electoral board prior to implementation.

Employees of the agency, business, or establishment who are appointed to serve as assistant registrars may be nonresidents of the jurisdiction they are appointed to serve, provided that (i) they are qualified voters of the Commonwealth and (ii) they serve only at their place of employment within the jurisdiction they are appointed to serve.

C. The general registrar or electoral board may set additional occasional sites and times for registration within the jurisdiction. A multi-family residential building not usually open to the public may be used as an occasional registration site so long as the public has free access to the site during the time for registering voters.

D. ~~The general registrar in each county or city shall designate registration locations, in addition to the general registrar's principal office, for registration at one or more times within the forty days immediately preceding the final day of registration prior to each November general election. He shall designate at least one location for each 5,000 of population in his county or city, but shall not be required to designate more than twenty locations for the purposes of this subsection. These locations shall be geographically dispersed throughout the county or city. Times for registration at these locations shall be scheduled, to the extent possible, after five o'clock p.m. or on weekends. Each general registrar shall file with the State Board by the immediately preceding August 15, the plans for these designated locations and the hours each location will be open.~~

§ 24.2-705. Emergency applications and absentee ballots for persons incapacitated or hospitalized.

Any person registered and otherwise qualified to vote who becomes incapacitated on or after the fifth day preceding an election may request at any time prior to noon on the day preceding the election that an emergency absentee ballot application be delivered to him. A voter who becomes hospitalized on or after the fourteenth day preceding the election and who is unable, because of his condition, to request an absentee ballot earlier than the fifth day preceding the election may request at any time prior to noon on the day before an election that an emergency absentee ballot be delivered to him in the hospital. For purposes of this section, "incapacitated" means hospitalized, ill and confined to his residence, bereaved by the death of a spouse, child, or parent, or otherwise incapacitated by an emergency which is found by the electoral board to justify providing an emergency ballot application; and "hospital" means a hospital as defined in § 32.1-123 and any comparable hospital in the District of Columbia or any state contiguous to Virginia.

On receipt of the request, the electoral board shall provide an emergency absentee ballot application to the incapacitated voter's designated representative who shall deliver the application to the voter. If the voter is hospitalized, the delivery shall be made to him at the hospital; and if the voter is otherwise incapacitated, the delivery shall be made to him at his current residence address as shown on the registration records. The representative shall be age eighteen or older and shall not be an elected official, a candidate for elected office, or the deputy, spouse, parent, or child of an elected official or candidate.

The application shall be on a form prescribed by the State Board and shall require the applicant (i) to state the cause of his incapacity, (ii) to state that he is unable to be present at the polls on election day, and that he was either incapacitated on or after the fifth day preceding the election or hospitalized on or after the fourteenth day preceding the election and unable to request the application earlier than the fifth day preceding the election, (iii) to designate a representative to receive, deliver and return the ballot, and (iv) to provide other information required by law for an absentee ballot application.

If the voter is hospitalized, a hospital administrative official or a licensed physician attending the applicant shall certify on the form to the hospitalization of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is ill and confined to his residence, a licensed physician or an accredited religious practitioner (~~as defined in § 24.2-421~~) attending the applicant shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is bereaved, a licensed physician, an accredited religious practitioner (~~as defined in § 24.2-421~~), or a funeral service licensee (as defined in § 54.1-2800) shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. If the voter is otherwise incapacitated as determined by the electoral board, the secretary of the electoral board shall certify on the form to the incapacity of the applicant and the applicant's inability to be present at the polls on election day. The applicant shall sign the application and state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that to the best of his knowledge and belief the facts contained in the application are true and correct. His signature shall be witnessed by the designated representative who shall sign and return the completed application to the office of the general registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. on the day preceding the election. *For the purposes of this section, "accredited religious practitioner" means a person who has been trained in spiritual healing or the other healing arts and has been so accredited by a formal religious order.*

On receipt of the completed application and a determination of the qualification of the applicant to vote, the general registrar or secretary of the electoral board shall provide, in accordance with the applicable provisions of this chapter, an absentee ballot to the designated representative for delivery to the incapacitated voter.

The incapacitated voter shall vote the absentee ballot as provided by law and mark it in the presence of the designated representative. The representative shall complete a statement, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016, that (i) he is the representative of the incapacitated voter; (ii) he personally delivered the ballot to the voter who applied for it; (iii) in his presence, the voter marked the ballot, the ballot was placed in the envelope provided, the envelope was sealed, and the statement on its reverse side was signed by the incapacitated voter; and (iv) the ballot was returned, under seal, to the electoral board at the registrar's office.

The ballot shall be counted only if the ballot is received by the electoral board (i) prior to noon on the day of the election in any county, city, or town which does not have a central absentee voter election district or (ii) prior to the closing of the polls in any county, city, or town which has a central absentee voter precinct.

2. That § 24.2-421 of the Code of Virginia is repealed.