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SENATE BILL NO. 960

Offered January 11, 2017

Prefiled January 2, 2017

A BILL to amend and reenact § 24.2-710 of the Code of Virginia, relating to absentee ballots; expediting the counting of absentee ballots returned by mail prior to election day.

Patrons—Spruill; Delegate: Tyler

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 24.2-710 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 24.2-710. Further duties of electoral board and general registrar; absentee voter applicant lists.**

On receipt of an absentee ballot, the electoral board or general registrar shall mark the date of receipt in the appropriate column opposite the name and address of the voter on the absentee voter applicant list maintained in the general registrar's office. A board member or registrar shall deposit the return envelope and the unopened ballot envelope in an appropriate container provided for the purpose, in which they shall remain until the day of the election, *unless the registrar opts to open sealed ballot envelopes in order to expedite the counting of absentee ballots in accordance with § 24.2-709.1.*

On the day before the election, the general registrar shall (i) make out in triplicate on a form prescribed by the State Board the absentee voter applicant list containing the names of all persons who applied for an absentee ballot through the third day before the election and (ii) by noon on the day before the election, deliver two copies of the list to the electoral board. The general registrar shall make out a supplementary list containing the names of all persons voting absentee in person pursuant to §§ 24.2-705.1 and 24.2-705.2, or applying to vote absentee pursuant to § 24.2-705, for delivery by 5:00 p.m. on the day before the election. The supplementary list shall be deemed part of the absentee voter applicant list and shall be prepared and delivered in accordance with the instructions of the State Board. The general registrar shall maintain one copy of the list in his office for two years as a public record open for inspection upon request during regular office hours.

On the day before the election, the electoral board shall deliver one copy of the list provided to it by the general registrar to the chief officer of election for each precinct. The list shall be attested by the secretary of the electoral board who shall be responsible for the delivery of the attested lists to the chief officer of election for each precinct.

Absentee ballots shall be accepted only from voters whose names appear on the attested list.

Before the polls close on the day of the election, the electoral board shall deliver the absentee ballot containers to, and obtain a receipt from, the officers of election at each appropriate precinct. Any ballot returned to the electoral board or general registrar prior to the closing of the polls, but after the ballot container has been delivered, shall be delivered in an appropriate container to the officers of election at each appropriate precinct. The containers shall be sealed prior to delivery to the officers and shall contain the sealed absentee ballots, the accompanying return envelopes, and a copy of the absentee voter applicant list for each precinct.

If the county or city uses a central absentee voter precinct pursuant to § 24.2-712, the lists and containers shall be delivered, as provided in this section, to the officers of election for the absentee precinct.

Before noon on the day following the election, the general registrar shall deliver all applications for absentee ballots for the election, under seal, to the clerk of the circuit court for the county or city, except that the general registrar may retain all applications for absentee ballots until the electoral board has ascertained the results of the election pursuant to § 24.2-671, and has determined the validity of and counted all provisional ballots pursuant to § 24.2-653, at which point all applications shall then be delivered, under seal, to the clerk of the circuit court for the county or city. The clerk shall retain the sealed applications with the counted ballots.

The secretary of the electoral board shall deliver all absentee ballots received after the election to the clerk of the circuit court.

Upon request, the State Board shall provide an electronic copy of the absentee voter applicant list to any political party or candidate. Such lists shall be used only for campaign and political purposes. In no event shall any list furnished under this section contain (i) any voter's social security number or any part thereof, (ii) any voter's day and month of birth, or (iii) the residence address of any voter who has provided a post office box address to be used on public lists pursuant to § 24.2-418.

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