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SENATE BILL NO. 1455

Offered January 20, 2021

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-702.1, 24.2-706, and 24.2-707 of the Code of Virginia, relating to absentee ballots; witness requirement; printed name and residence address.

Patron—Ruff

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-702.1, 24.2-706, and 24.2-707 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-702.1. Federal write-in absentee ballots.

A. Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, a covered voter, as defined in § 24.2-452, may use a federal write-in absentee ballot in any election. Such ballot shall be submitted and processed in the manner provided by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.) and this article.

B. Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, a federal write-in absentee ballot submitted pursuant to subsection A shall be considered valid for purposes of simultaneously satisfying both an absentee ballot application and a completed absentee ballot, provided that the ballot is received no later than the deadline for the return of absentee ballots as provided in § 24.2-709 for the election in which the voter offers to vote, and the application contains the following information: (i) the voter's signature; however, if the voter is unable to sign, the person assisting the voter will note this fact in the voter signature box; (ii) the voter's printed name; (iii) the county or city in which he is registered and offers to vote; (iv) the residence address at which he is registered to vote; (v) his current military or overseas address; and (vi) the signature, *printed name, and residence address* of a witness ~~who shall sign~~ placed on the same application. *Failure to list a zip code shall not be considered a material omission and shall not render the voter's ballot void.*

C. This section shall not be construed to require that an absentee ballot be sent to the absentee voter on receipt of a federal write-in absentee ballot unless the voter has also submitted an absentee ballot application pursuant to § 24.2-701.

§ 24.2-706. Duty of general registrar on receipt of application; statement of voter.

A. On receipt of an application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar shall enroll the name and address of each registered applicant on an absentee voter applicant list that shall be maintained in the office of the general registrar with a file of the applications received. The list shall be available for inspection and copying and the applications shall be available for inspection only by any registered voter during regular office hours. Upon request and for a reasonable fee, the Department of Elections shall provide an electronic copy of the absentee voter applicant list to any political party or candidate. Such list shall be used only for campaign and political purposes. Any list made available for inspection and copying under this section shall contain the post office box address in lieu of the residence street address for any individual who has furnished at the time of registration or subsequently, in addition to his street address, a post office box address pursuant to subsection B of § 24.2-418.

No list or application containing an individual's social security number, or any part thereof, or the individual's day and month of birth, shall be made available for inspection or copying by anyone. The Department of Elections shall prescribe procedures for general registrars to make the information in the lists and applications available in a manner that does not reveal social security numbers or parts thereof, or an individual's day and month of birth.

B. The completion and timely delivery of an application for an absentee ballot shall be construed to be an offer by the applicant to vote in the election.

The general registrar shall note on each application received whether the applicant is or is not a registered voter. In reviewing the application for an absentee ballot, the general registrar shall not reject the application of any individual because of an error or omission on any record or paper relating to the application, if such error or omission is not material in determining whether such individual is qualified to vote absentee.

If the application has been properly completed and signed and the applicant is a registered voter of the precinct in which he offers to vote, the general registrar shall, at the time when the printed ballots for the election are available, send by the deadline set out in § 24.2-612, obtaining a certificate or other evidence of either first-class or expedited mailing or delivery from the United States Postal Service or other commercial delivery provider, or deliver to him in person in the office of the registrar, the

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59 following items and nothing else:

60 1. An envelope containing the folded ballot, sealed and marked "Ballot within. Do not open except
61 in presence of a witness."

62 2. An envelope, with printing only on the flap side, for resealing the marked ballot, on which
63 envelope is printed the following:

64 "Statement of Voter."

65 "I do hereby state, subject to felony penalties for making false statements pursuant to § 24.2-1016,
66 that my FULL NAME is _____ (last, first, middle); that I am now or have been at some time since
67 last November's general election a legal resident of _____ (STATE YOUR LEGAL RESIDENCE IN
68 VIRGINIA including the house number, street name or rural route address, city, zip code); that I
69 received the enclosed ballot(s) upon application to the registrar of such county or city; that I opened the
70 envelope marked 'ballot within' and marked the ballot(s) in the presence of the witness, without
71 assistance or knowledge on the part of anyone as to the manner in which I marked it (or I am returning
72 the form required to report how I was assisted); that I then sealed the ballot(s) in this envelope; and that
73 I have not voted and will not vote in this election at any other time or place.

74 Signature of Voter _____

75 Date _____

76 Signature of witness _____

77 Printed name of witness _____

78 Witness residence address _____"

79 For elections held after January 1, 2004, instead of the envelope containing the above oath, an
80 envelope containing the standard oath prescribed by the presidential designee under § 101(b)(7) of the
81 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.) shall be sent to
82 voters who are qualified to vote absentee under that Act.

83 When this statement has been properly completed and signed by the registered voter and witnessed,
84 his ballot shall not be subject to challenge pursuant to § 24.2-651.

85 3. A properly addressed envelope for the return of the ballot to the general registrar by mail or by
86 the applicant in person.

87 4. Printed instructions for completing the ballot and statement on the envelope and returning the
88 ballot.

89 For federal elections held after January 1, 2004, for any voter who is required by subparagraph (b) of
90 52 U.S.C. § 21083 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to show identification the first time the voter
91 votes in a federal election in the state, the printed instructions shall direct the voter to submit with his
92 ballot (i) a copy of a current and valid photo identification or (ii) a copy of a current utility bill, bank
93 statement, government check, paycheck or other government document that shows the name and address
94 of the voter. Such individual who desires to vote by mail but who does not submit one of the forms of
95 identification specified in this paragraph may cast such ballot by mail and the ballot shall be counted as
96 a provisional ballot under the provisions of § 24.2-653.01. The Department of Elections shall provide
97 instructions to the electoral boards for the handling and counting of such provisional ballots pursuant to
98 § 24.2-653.01 and this section.

99 5. For any voter entitled to vote absentee under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee
100 Voting Act (52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.), information provided by the Department of Elections specific to
101 the voting rights and responsibilities for such citizens, or information provided by the registrar specific
102 to the status of the voter registration and absentee ballot application of such voter, may be included.

103 The envelopes and instructions shall be in the form prescribed by the Department of Elections.

104 C. If the applicant completes his application in person under § 24.2-701 at a time when the printed
105 ballots for the election are available, he may request that the general registrar send to him by mail the
106 items set forth in subdivisions B 1 through 4, instead of casting the ballot in person. Such request shall
107 be made no later than 5:00 p.m. on the eleventh day prior to the election in which the applicant offers
108 to vote, and the general registrar shall send those items to the applicant by mail, obtaining a certificate
109 or other evidence of mailing.

110 D. If the applicant is a covered voter, as defined in § 24.2-452, the general registrar, at the time
111 when the printed ballots for the election are available, shall mail by the deadline set forth in § 24.2-612
112 or deliver in person to the applicant in the office of the general registrar the items as set forth in
113 subdivisions B 1 through 4 and, if necessary, an application for registration. A certificate or other
114 evidence of mailing shall not be required. If the applicant requests that such items be sent by electronic
115 transmission, the general registrar, at the time when the printed ballots for the election are available but
116 not later than the deadline set forth in § 24.2-612, shall send by electronic transmission the blank ballot,
117 the form for the envelope for returning the marked ballot, and instructions to the voter. Such materials
118 shall be sent using the official email address or fax number of the office of the general registrar
119 published on the Department of Elections website. The State Board of Elections may prescribe by
120 regulation the format of the email address used for transmitting ballots to eligible voters. A general

registrar may also use electronic transmission facilities provided by the Federal Voting Assistance Program. The voted ballot shall be returned to the general registrar as otherwise required by this chapter.

E. The circuit courts shall have jurisdiction to issue an injunction to enforce the provisions of this section upon the application of (i) any aggrieved voter, (ii) any candidate in an election district in whole or in part in the court's jurisdiction where a violation of this section has occurred, or is likely to occur, or (iii) the campaign committee or the appropriate district political party chairman of such candidate. Any person who fails to discharge his duty as provided in this section through willful neglect of duty and with malicious intent shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor as provided in subsection A of § 24.2-1001.

§ 24.2-707. How ballots marked and returned by mail.

On receipt of a mailed absentee ballot, the voter shall, in the presence of a witness, (i) open the sealed envelope marked "ballot within" and (ii) mark and refold the ballot, as provided in §§ 24.2-644 and 24.2-646 without assistance and without making known how he marked the ballot, except as provided by § 24.2-704.

After the voter has marked his absentee ballot, he shall (a) enclose the ballot in the envelope provided for that purpose, (b) seal the envelope, (c) fill in and sign the statement printed on the back of the envelope in the presence of a witness, who shall sign *and print his name and residence address on* the same envelope, (d) enclose the ballot envelope and any required assistance form within the envelope directed to the general registrar, and (e) seal that envelope and mail it to the office of the general registrar or deliver it personally to the general registrar. A voter's failure to provide in the statement on the back of the envelope his full middle name or his middle initial shall not be a material omission, rendering his ballot void, unless the voter failed to provide in the statement on the back of the envelope his full first and last name. A voter's failure to provide the date, or any part of the date, including the year, on which he signed the statement printed on the back of the envelope shall not be considered a material omission and shall not render his ballot void. *A witness's failure to list a zip code shall not be considered a material omission and shall not render the voter's ballot void.*

For purposes of this chapter, "mail" shall include delivery by a commercial delivery service, but shall not include delivery by a personal courier service or another individual except as provided by §§ 24.2-703.2 and 24.2-705.

Failure to follow the procedures set forth in this section shall render the applicant's ballot void.