2023 -- S 0613 SUBSTITUTE A

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LC002384/SUB A
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

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RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- VOTING DISTRICTS AND OFFICIALS

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1   SECTION 1. Sections 17-11-1 and 17-11-1.1 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-11 entitled

2 "Voting Districts and Officials" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3   **17-11-1. Division of towns and representative district into voting districts.**

4   (a) The local board of any city or town may, on or before the sixtieth (60th) day preceding

5 any election, divide or redivide the city or town, or any representative district in the city or town,

6 into voting districts. The local board of each city or town shall determine voting districts by

7 geographical boundaries and by no other means. No voting district shall at any time comprise parts

8 of two (2) or more wards. It shall be the duty of the board to divide the city or town, representative

9 district, or ward, so that substantially not more than three thousand (3000) total eligible registered

10 voters shall be served by the same polling place; provided, however, that any divisions conducted

11 by the local board pursuant to this section shall not result in creating a polling place serving less

12 than five hundred (500) total eligible registered voters, except when a polling place is located in a

13 low-income or elderly residential development, or when it is caused by legislative district

14 boundaries; and provided, further, that no existing polling place which is presently located in a low-

15 income or elderly residential development shall be eliminated. Upon the establishment and

16 approval of any polling place by the state board, changes to the polling place shall not be allowed

17 until the next redistricting by the general assembly, unless the polling place becomes unavailable

18 to the city or town, or no longer meets polling place minimum requirements as established by the

19 state board, then the city or town may take the appropriate action to replace the polling place. A

1　polling place may be located either within or without the voting district for which it is established;

2　provided, that a polling place may be located outside the district only upon unanimous

3　determination of the local board and subject to the approval of the state board that a suitable place

4　is not available within the voting district.

5　(b) Uniform standards for polling place location. When cities and towns shall, subject to

6　the approval of the state board, designate polling locations in accordance with the provisions of this

7　section and § 17-19-3.2, they shall take into account the following factors:

8　(1) Accessibility of the polling place to historically disenfranchised communities,

9　including cultural groups, ethnic groups, and minority groups;

10　(2) Proximity of polling places to dense concentrations of voters;

11　(3) Accessibility of polling places by public transportation;

12　(4) Ensuring equitable distribution of polling places in the city or town; and

13　(5) Maximizing voter participation, including through the use of community centers and

14　public gathering places as polling places.

15　**17-11-1.1. Combination of voting districts for special election.**

16　(a) The board of canvassers of any city or town at which there shall be submitted to the

17　voters a question or questions for their approval or rejection or at which officials will be elected,

18　shall have the authority to combine two (2) or more voting districts, when in its judgment the

19　combination is advisable~~,~~. ~~and when combined shall be treated as a voting district,~~ The board may

20　by unanimous vote make such designation for any special election, but only upon the approval of

21　the board of elections.

22　(b) If voting districts are combined as provided in subsection (a), the local board must

23　advertise the combination of districts in a newspaper of general circulation in the city or town no

24　less than seven (7) days and no more than twenty-one (21) days before the special election.

25　(c) [Deleted by P.L. 2019, ch. 69, § 1 and P.L. 2019, ch. 79, § 1.]

26　(d) ~~Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (a) and (b), the board of canvassers of~~

27　~~the town of Bristol may combine two (2) or more voting districts for the representative district 68~~

28　~~special election in March, 2019, and when combined shall be treated as a voting district, but only~~

29　~~upon the approval of the board of elections.~~

30　SECTION 2. Section 17-15-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-15 entitled "Primary

31　Elections" is hereby amended to read as follows:

32　**17-15-5. Combination of voting districts.**

33　Local boards shall have the power to combine two (2) or more voting districts within the

34　same ward, and senatorial or representative district, if applicable. ~~and the combined district shall~~

1   ~~be treated as a voting district,~~ The local board may by unanimous vote make such designation for

2   any primary, special primary, or presidential preference primary, but only upon the approval of the

3   board of elections.

4   SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

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RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- VOTING DISTRICTS AND OFFICIALS

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1   This act would require a unanimous vote of the local board of canvassers for the

2 combination of voting districts for any special election and would require a unanimous vote of the

3 local board of canvassers for the combination of voting districts for any primary, special election

4 or presidential preference primary and would provide factors to consider when designating polling

5 locations, taking into account accessibility of the polling location to disenfranchised communities,

6 proximity to dense concentration of voters, accessibility to public transportation and maximizing

7 voter participation.

8   This act would take effect upon passage.

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