

2024 -- H 7248

LC003921

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- VOTING DISTRICTS AND OFFICIALS -- POLLING PLACE
CAP

Introduced By: Representatives Baginski, and J. Brien

Date Introduced: January 19, 2024

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 17-11-1 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-11 entitled "Voting
2 Districts and Officials" is 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 ~~(3,000)~~ three thousand five
10 hundred (3,500) total active, eligible registered voters shall be served by the same polling place;
11 provided, however, that any divisions conducted by the local board pursuant to this section shall
12 not result in creating a polling place serving less than five hundred (500) total eligible registered
13 voters, except when a polling place is located in a low-income or elderly residential development,
14 or when it is caused by legislative district boundaries; and provided, further, that no existing polling
15 place that is presently located in a low-income or elderly residential development shall be
16 eliminated. Upon the establishment and approval of any polling place by the state board, changes
17 to the polling place shall not be allowed until the next redistricting by the general assembly, unless
18 the polling place becomes unavailable to the city or town or no longer meets polling place minimum

1 requirements as established by the state board, then the city or town may take the appropriate action
2 to replace the polling place. A polling place may be located either within or without the voting
3 district for which it is established; provided, that a polling place may be located outside the district
4 only upon unanimous determination of the local board and subject to the approval of the state board
5 that a suitable place is not available within the voting district.

6 (b) **Uniform standards for polling place location.** When cities and towns shall, subject
7 to the approval of the state board, designate polling locations in accordance with the provisions of
8 this section and § 17-19-3.2, they shall take into account the following factors:

9 (1) Accessibility of the polling place to historically disenfranchised communities,
10 including cultural groups, ethnic groups, and minority groups;

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

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

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

14 (5) Maximizing voter participation, including through the use of community centers and
15 public gathering places as polling places.

16 (c) **Established polling places unaffected.** Any polling place established by the local
17 board and approved in accordance with subsections (a) and (b) of this section that, in the course of
18 the normal rise and fall of voter registrations, exceeds the total registered voter threshold
19 established by this section for a biennial general election, shall be permitted to continue over the
20 cap set by subsection (a) of this section until such time as polling places are reestablished following
21 the next decennial redistricting, but only upon unanimous approval of the local board and additional
22 certification by the board of elections that the polling place can sufficiently serve the anticipated
23 voter turnout for each separate general election that the polling place will be utilized.

24 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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1 This act would increase the maximum number of voters that a polling place can
2 accommodate from three thousand (3,000) to three thousand five hundred (3,500) calculated using
3 active voters, and would provide for polling places that exceed the maximum number of voters not
4 be required to be changed until the next decennial redistricting.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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