

2025 -- H 5517

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTION -- VOTING DISTRICTS AND OFFICIALS

Introduced By: Representatives Baginski, Paplauskas, and Lima

Date Introduced: February 13, 2025

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 eligible registered voters shall be served by the same polling place; provided,  
11 however, that any divisions conducted by the local board pursuant to this section shall not result in  
12 creating a polling place serving less than five hundred (500) total eligible registered voters, except  
13 when a polling place is located in a low-income or elderly residential development, or when it is  
14 caused by legislative district boundaries; and provided, further, that no existing polling place that  
15 is presently located in a low-income or elderly residential development shall be eliminated. Upon  
16 the establishment and approval of any polling place by the state board, changes to the polling place  
17 shall not be allowed until the next redistricting by the general assembly, unless the polling place  
18 becomes unavailable to the city or town or no longer meets polling place minimum requirements  
19 as established by the state board, then the city or town may take the appropriate action to replace

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

5 (b) **Uniform standards for polling place location.** When cities and towns shall, subject  
6 to the approval of the state board, designate polling locations in accordance with the provisions of  
7 this 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 (c) Established polling places unaffected.

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

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

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO ELECTION -- VOTING DISTRICTS AND OFFICIALS

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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), and would  
3 provide for existing polling places that exceed the maximum number of voters, not to be changed  
4 until the next decennial redistricting, if approved by a unanimous vote of the local board and  
5 certified by the state board of elections.

6           This act would take effect upon passage.

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