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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 ELECTIONS -- LOCAL CANVASSING AUTHORITIES

Introduced By: Senators Burke, Pearson, Bissailon, and Appollonio

Date Introduced: February 26, 2025

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 17-8-1, 17-8-2 and 17-8-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-8  
2 entitled "Local Canvassing Authorities" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-8-1. Appointment of bipartisan authority.**

4 (a) The legislative body of each city and town shall appoint a bipartisan canvassing  
5 authority of three (3) qualified electors of the city or town, not more than two (2) of whom shall  
6 belong to the same political party, and ~~may~~ shall appoint two (2) alternate members, not more than  
7 one of whom shall belong to the same political party. At any meeting of the canvassing authority  
8 at which a member is to be absent, the member may request that an alternate replace him or her for  
9 that meeting; provided, that the alternate member must be of the same political party as the member.

10 The mayor, in cities and towns that elect a mayor, or the president of the town council, in cities and  
11 towns with no elected mayor, shall, within thirty (30) days of receipt of lists, nominate the members  
12 of the canvassing authority from lists of party voters submitted by the respective chairpersons of  
13 the city or town political committee, which lists shall contain the names of five (5) times the number  
14 of persons to be appointed. If the legislative body refuses to approve the nomination of any person  
15 to the canvassing authority, the mayor or the president shall submit to the legislative body, within  
16 thirty (30) days of the refusal, another person named on one of the lists, and so on until a person is  
17 appointed. If the chairperson of the city or town committee of a political party entitled to an  
18 appointment fails or refuses to submit a list, within thirty (30) days of notice of a vacancy, the  
19 mayor or the council president, as the case may be, shall nominate any party voter of the political

1 party entitled to the appointment.

2 (b) In any instance, in which a vacancy occurs and the remaining two (2) members of the  
3 canvassing authority each belong to different political parties, the respective chairpersons of any  
4 recognized city or town political party committee that has duly filed a biennial organization with  
5 the canvassing authority, in accordance with § 17-12-9, shall each be entitled to submit a list, and  
6 the mayor or the council president, as the case may be, shall nominate any party voter from any of  
7 the submitted lists, in accordance with the procedures of subsection (a) of this section.

8 **17-8-2. Term and qualifications for office.**

9 (a) Each member of a local canvassing authority shall be appointed to serve for a term of  
10 six (6) years beginning on the first Monday of March succeeding the date of his or her appointment  
11 and until his or her successor is elected and qualified. No person shall be appointed or serve as a  
12 member of the authority who is an officer or employee of the United States or of this state, or who  
13 is an officer or employee of the authority's city or town; provided, that in any city a member of the  
14 authority may be employed as its clerk. Any member of the authority who becomes a candidate for  
15 election to any public office and who fails to file a declination of the candidacy within the time  
16 allowed by law shall be disqualified from holding membership upon the authority and his or her  
17 successor shall be immediately elected.

18 (b) The fixed six (6) year terms of members of a local canvassing authority, shall expire on  
19 a staggered basis on the first Monday of March in odd-numbered years; provided that, not more  
20 than one member's term, shall expire in any odd-numbered year. If the term expiration dates on  
21 record for any canvassing authority members are found to be in noncompliance with the provisions  
22 of this section, the town or city clerk shall immediately correct them.

23 (c) The fixed six (6) year terms of alternates of a local canvassing authority shall expire on  
24 the first Monday of March in any odd-numbered year.

25 **17-8-5. Local boards — Powers and duties — Quorum.**

26 (a) Each canvassing authority shall have and exercise the functions, powers, and duties  
27 provided for local boards by this title or by any law not inconsistent with this title. It shall:

28 (1) Select one of its members as presiding officer and another as clerk of the board;  
29 provided, that nothing in this title shall be deemed to affect the powers and duties of the town clerk  
30 who shall be ex officio the clerk of the respective town canvassing authorities; and provided,  
31 further, that in the cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport, Woonsocket, Cranston, and  
32 Warwick, the clerk shall be designated at the time of his or her election or appointment;

33 (2) Have and discharge all of the functions, powers, and duties of the town council  
34 concerning nominations, elections, registration of voters and canvassing rights, the preparing and

1 correcting of voting lists, and other related matters, which powers are transferred to the local board;

2 (3) Make or furnish all returns or other things required by law to be made or furnished to  
3 or by city clerks, boards of canvassers, and district clerks, relative to any matter within the purview  
4 of this title;

5 (4) Appoint and employ all its necessary clerical and technical assistants and fix the  
6 compensation of each person appointed, within the limits of funds available to it pursuant to law;  
7 provided, that in the cities of Cranston and Woonsocket and the town of Coventry the employment  
8 and compensation shall be subject to the approval of the respective city or town councils;

9 (5) The town or city clerk, or designee, in municipalities where the town or city clerk is by  
10 law, charter, or ordinance charged with the functions of election administration, shall be the chief  
11 local election official, primary administrative contact, and liaison from the canvassing authority  
12 and local board to the secretary of state and to the state board of elections, except in towns and  
13 cities where an election office, separate from the town or city clerk, is charged with election  
14 administration, said chief local election official shall be designated by the local board and shall  
15 hold the same duties. The chief local election official, upon taking office as city or town clerk, or  
16 upon designation by the local board, as the case may be, shall designate an alternate local election  
17 official, and shall at all times provide and maintain emergency contact information for, at minimum,  
18 the chief local election official, the alternate local election official, and the chairperson of the board  
19 of canvassers on file with the secretary of state and state board of elections; and

20 (6) The chief local election official shall, under the direction of the local board, have the  
21 authority to coordinate with the secretary of state to add, modify, or revoke access to the statewide  
22 central voter register for any system users in the municipality, who require it in order to carry out  
23 the duties imposed on the canvassing authority by this title.

24 (b) A quorum of a local board for the purpose of receiving registrations shall be comprised  
25 of one member of the board, and for all other purposes a quorum shall be comprised of two (2)  
26 members.

27 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2026.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
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1           This act would require the respective party chairpersons to submit lists of party voters to  
2 the mayor or council president, as the case may be, within thirty (30) days of notice of vacancy, in  
3 a municipal election office and would require the mayor or council president to make a nomination  
4 for a replacement to the council within thirty (30) days of receipt of the lists. It would also clarify  
5 the term expiration dates for canvassing authority members and alternates, and would direct the  
6 city or town clerk to make immediate corrections if the term expiration dates on record are found  
7 to be in noncompliance with the provisions of this act. The act would require the local canvassing  
8 board to designate a chief local election official, and for that designee to designate an alternate local  
9 election official. It would further establish that the chief local election official is the only agent  
10 authorized to request user access to the statewide central voter register via the secretary of state.

11           This act would take effect on January 1, 2026.

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