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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS

Introduced By: Representatives O'Brien, Shanley, Solomon, Dawson, Biah, McEntee, Noret, Read, Azzinaro, and Corvese

Date Introduced: January 07, 2026

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

(Secretary of State)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 17-20-6.1 and 17-20-9 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-20 entitled

2 "Mail Ballots" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-20-6.1. Alternative methods of voting by citizens covered by the Uniformed and**

4 **Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) and other citizens residing outside the**

5 **United States. [Effective December 31, 2025.]**

6 (a) It is the intent and purpose that the provisions set forth in this section are designed to
7 facilitate the federal mandate of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act
8 (UOCAVA), 52 U.S.C. § 20301 et seq.

9 (b) The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) may be used as a request for an absentee
10 ballot by:

11 (1) A member of the armed forces who is absent from the state by reason of being in active
12 service;

13 (2) Any person absent from the state in performance of "services intimately connected with
14 military operations" as defined in § 17-20-3(d);

15 (3) Any person who is employed outside of the United States as defined in § 17-20-3(c);
16 and

17 (4) Any person who does not qualify under subparagraph (1), (2), or (3) above, but who is
18 a citizen of the United States and absent from the state and residing outside the United States as
19 described in chapter 21.1 of this title.

(c) The single FPCA card shall permit the person to request an absentee ballot for each primary and election through the next general election for federal office or for the time period specified by federal law in which the voter is eligible to vote.

4 (d) The FPCA card must be received by the local board of canvassers where the person last
5 maintains his or her residence for voting purposes within the time frame for applying for absentee
6 ballots as set forth in this title.

7 (e) If the FPCA, when used in accordance with this section, is sent by the voter through
8 electronic transmission, it must be sent to the secretary of state and it must be received by the
9 secretary of state by the deadline for applying for absentee ballots as set forth in this title. The
10 secretary of state shall then forward the FPCA to the appropriate local authority who shall
11 immediately certify and return the FPCA to the secretary of state with the notation that the
12 corresponding ballots shall be sent by mail and electronic transmission. ~~The secretary of state shall~~

13 ~~transmit ballots only to the facsimile number provided by the Federal Voter Assistance Program.~~

14 The secretary of state shall approve electronically transmitted ballots to and from eligible

15 voters only through a service or solution that meets the following requirements:

(1) The system has had one or more independent security reviews;

17 (2) Demonstrates the system meets the National Institute of Standards and Technology
18 (NIST) Cybersecurity Framework guidelines or federal cybersecurity framework guidelines of a
19 successor designated federal agency or organization; and

20 (3) Approved by the secretary of state.

21 The ballots sent by electronic transmission shall be returned to the state board by electronic
22 transmission. These ballots will be counted at the state board in accordance with rules and
23 regulations promulgated by the state board.

24 (f) The voter's signature on the FPCA does not need to be witnessed or notarized, when
25 the FPCA is submitted as provided in this section.

26 (g) If a voter is casting a mail ballot received through the use of the FPCA card as provided
27 in this section, the voter's signature does not need to be witnessed or notarized on the certifying
28 envelope used for the return of the voted mail ballot.

17-20-9. Application to be placed on the permanent mail ballot application list.

30 (a) A voter, by signing an application, may request that a mail ballot application be sent to
31 the voter automatically for every election. The application and instructions shall be prescribed by
32 the secretary of state, and furnished upon request to any elector by each local board of canvassers.
33 The envelope containing the mail ballot application shall be clearly marked as not forwardable. If
34 any elector is no longer an eligible voter the elector shall notify the local board of canvassers of

1 this fact. The local board shall remove the name of any voter from the mailing list established under
2 this section upon receipt of reliable information that a voter no longer qualifies for the service. The
3 voter shall be notified of the action within five (5) days after the board takes the action.

4 (b) The application and instructions prescribed in this section shall be mailed to the
5 applicant along with a stamped return envelope addressed to the local boards of canvassers. The
6 secretary of state may process applications pursuant to this section through the online mail ballot
7 application portal established by § 17-20-2.3.

8 (c) [Deleted by P.L. 2025, ch. 231, § 1 and P.L. 2025, ch. 232, § 1.]

9 (d) The secretary of state shall maintain a list in the central voter registration system of all
10 voters who automatically receive applications for mail ballots, pursuant to this section.

11 (e) [Expires December 31, 2025.] Eligible disabled voters shall be entitled to electronically
12 receive and return their mail ballot, using the same electronic transmission system as that used by
13 voters covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). This
14 electronic process shall satisfy the federal Rehabilitation Act, section 508 concerning accessibility
15 standards.

16 (f) [Expires December 31, 2025.] For purposes of this section, "eligible disabled voter"
17 means a person with disabilities eligible to vote who is incapacitated to such an extent that it would
18 be an undue hardship to vote at the polls because of illness, mental or physical disability, blindness,
19 or a serious impairment of mobility.

20 (g) Eligible disabled voters shall be entitled to electronically receive and return their mail
21 ballot, using the same electronic transmission system as that used by voters covered by the
22 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. (UOCAVA). This electronic process shall
23 satisfy the federal Rehabilitation Act, section 508 concerning accessibility standards.

24 (h) For purposes of this section, "eligible disabled voter" means a person with disabilities
25 eligible to vote who is incapacitated to such an extent that it would be an undue hardship to vote at
26 the polls because of illness, mental or physical disability, blindness, or a serious impairment of
27 mobility.

28 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 allow eligible disabled and military voters to continue to utilize
- 2 electronically transmitted ballots as originally enacted in 2022.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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