

2026 -- H 7979

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS

Introduced By: Representatives Messier, Edwards, and Furtado

Date Introduced: February 27, 2026

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

(Board of Elections)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 17-20-23 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-20 entitled "Mail  
2 Ballots" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-20-23. Marking and certification of ballot.**

4 (a) A voter may vote for the candidates of the voter's choice by making a mark in the space  
5 provided opposite their respective names.

6 (b) In case a voter desires to vote upon a question submitted to the vote of the electors of  
7 the state, the voter shall mark in the appropriate space associated with the answer that the voter  
8 desires to give.

9 (c) The voter shall enclose and seal the ballot in the envelope provided for it. The voter  
10 shall then enclose and seal the certified envelope with the ballot in the envelope addressed to the  
11 state board and cause the envelope to be deposited into any official drop box or delivered to the  
12 state board ~~on or before~~ no later than eight o'clock (8:00) pm on election day.

13 (d) These ballots shall be counted only if received within the time limited by this chapter.

14 (e) A voter who receives the ballot by mail may return it via the United States Postal  
15 Service, deposit into an official elections drop box, or deliver to the state board of elections no later  
16 than eight o'clock (8:00) pm on election day by the voter or immediately by a person deemed  
17 authorized by the voter that is not affiliated with a candidate for office or a political campaign.

18 (f) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (e) of this section, a ballot may be returned  
19 by an immediate family member or member of a voter's household, even if that immediate family

1 member or member of the household is a candidate for office or someone affiliated with a political  
2 campaign.

3 (g) No person affiliated with a candidate for office or a political campaign shall possess a  
4 voter's mail ballot other than their own, except if the person is an immediate family member,  
5 caregiver of the voter, or lives in the same household as the voter, the staff of the state board of  
6 elections, staff of the canvassing authority of the city or town in which the voter is registered, the  
7 staff of the secretary of state, any official printer of mail ballot forms and its designated carriers,  
8 the United States Postal Service, any other carrier, courier or messenger service recognized and  
9 approved by the state board of elections, or any person authorized by the state board of elections to  
10 receive and process official mail ballot forms and envelopes, including members of the state board  
11 of elections and local board of canvassers members.

12 (h) No person affiliated with a candidate for office or a political campaign shall be  
13 knowingly present when a voter executes their mail ballot, unless the person is an immediate family  
14 member or lives in the same household as the voter, or is authorized by law to be present, when the  
15 mail ballot is executed in the office of the canvassing authority of the city or town in which the  
16 voter is registered or the state board of elections or those appointed as provided in § 17-20-14.

17 (i) For purposes of this subsection, immediate family member means a parent, grandparent,  
18 sibling, spouse, partner, child, or grandchild by blood, marriage, or adoption.

19 (j) Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, nothing set forth herein shall limit or  
20 restrict any voter who requires assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to  
21 read or write, to receive assistance by a person of the voter's choice, other than the voter's employer,  
22 or agent of that employer, or officer or agent of the voter's union, in accordance with § 17-19-26.1.

23 (k) Any reference to "mail ballot" or "ballot by mail" in in this section shall be construed  
24 to also apply to an emergency mail ballot as provided for in § 17-20-2.2.

25 ~~(l)~~ There shall be a space provided on the general election ballot to allow the voter to  
26 write in the names of persons not in nomination by any party as provided for in §§ 17-19-31 and  
27 17-20- 24.

28 (m) A person who knowingly and willfully violates the provisions of this section shall be  
29 guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be subject to the penalties provided for in § 17-26-2.

30 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 amend the procedures for the marking and certification of mail ballots by
- 2 prohibiting anyone but the voter or certain persons close to the voter from handling the mail ballot.
- 3           This act would take effect upon passage.

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