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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 -- NOMINATION OF PARTY AND INDEPENDENT  
CANDIDATES -- DECLARATION OF CANDIDACY AND PRIMARY VOTES

Introduced By: Senators Raptakis, Burke, de la Cruz, Quezada, Thompson, Tikoian,  
DiPalma, Ciccone, Urso, and Zurier

Date Introduced: March 05, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1           SECTION 1. Sections 17-14-1, 17-14-11 and 17-14-12 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-  
2   14 entitled "Nomination of Party and Independent Candidates" are hereby amended to read as  
3   follows:

4           **17-14-1. Declarations of candidacy.**

5           During the ~~last~~ first consecutive Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in ~~June~~ April in the  
6   even years and during the thirty-ninth (39th) and fortieth (40th) days preceding a primary election  
7   for a special election for state or local office, or for an election for state or local office regularly  
8   scheduled for a time other than the biennial general statewide election, or during the sixty-seventh  
9   (67th) and sixty-eighth (68th) days preceding a primary election for a special election for federal  
10   office, or for an election for federal office regularly scheduled for a time other than the biennial  
11   general statewide election, each voter desiring to be a candidate at the upcoming primary or an  
12   independent candidate on final nomination papers shall, on a form that shall be provided by the  
13   secretary of state, file a declaration of their candidacy not later than four o'clock (4:00) p.m. of the  
14   last day for the filing with the secretary of state for congressional and statewide general offices, or  
15   with the local board of the place of the candidate's voting residence for general assembly, or state  
16   committee or senatorial and representative district committee, or with the appropriate local board  
17   for local officers. The declaration shall be signed by the candidate as the candidate's name appears  
18   on the voting list. The signature shall be accepted as valid if it can be reasonably identified to be

1 the name and signature of the voter it purports to be. A variation of the voter's signature by the  
2 insertion or omission of identifying titles or by the substitution of initials for the first or middle  
3 names or both shall not in itself be grounds for invalidation of the signature. The declaration shall  
4 also include the following information:

5 (1) The candidate's name as it appears on the voting list, subject to the same provisions as  
6 relate to the voter's signature on the declaration;

7 (2) The address as it appears on the voting list, provided that an address that is substantially  
8 the same as the address on the voting list shall be valid;

9 (3) The party declaration if seeking to run in a party primary;

10 (4) The office sought;

11 (5) The place and date of birth;

12 (6) The length of residence in the state and in the town or city where the candidate resides;

13 (7) A certification that the candidate is neither serving a sentence, including probation or  
14 parole, for which the candidate was imprisoned upon final conviction of a felony imposed on any  
15 date nor serving any sentence, whether incarcerated or suspended, on probation or parole, upon  
16 final conviction of a felony committed after November 5, 1986;

17 (8) A certification that the candidate has not been lawfully adjudicated to be non compos  
18 mentis, of unsound mind;

19 (9) In the case of candidates for party nomination, a certification that the candidate has not  
20 been a member of a political party other than the declared party within ninety (90) days of the filing  
21 date, except in the case of candidates for party nomination for a special election for federal office,  
22 or for an election for federal office regularly scheduled for a time other than the biennial general  
23 statewide election, that person shall not have been a member of a political party other than the  
24 declared political party within thirty (30) days of the filing of their declaration of candidacy; and

25 (10) If a person is a candidate for a state or local office, a certification that the person has  
26 not within the preceding three (3) years served any sentence, incarcerated or suspended, on  
27 probation or parole, for a crime committed after November 5, 1986, upon a plea of nolo contendere  
28 or guilty or upon a conviction of a felony or for a misdemeanor for which a sentence of  
29 imprisonment for six (6) months or more, whether suspended or to be served was imposed.

30 **17-14-11. Checking and certification of nomination papers — Challenge.**

31 (a) Each nomination paper for party and independent candidates shall be submitted before  
32 four o'clock (4:00) p.m. on the sixtieth (60th) day before the primary to the local board of the city  
33 or town where the signers appear to be voters or, in the case of special elections for state and local  
34 office, on the twenty-eighth (28th) day before the primary, or in the case of special elections for

1 federal office, on the fifty-third (53rd) day before the primary. Nomination papers for independent  
2 presidential candidates and presidential candidates of political parties, other than those defined in  
3 § 17-1-2(9), shall be filed not later than ~~sixty (60)~~ ninety (90) days prior to the general election.  
4 Each local board shall immediately proceed to check signatures on each nomination paper filed  
5 with it against the voting list as last canvassed or published according to law.

6 (b) The local boards shall certify a sufficient number of names appearing on the nomination  
7 papers that are in conformity with the requirements of § 17-14-8 to qualify the candidate for a  
8 position on the ballot, and after considering any challenge under this section and, if necessary,  
9 certifying any additional valid names, shall immediately file nomination papers for statewide  
10 office, general assembly, and state and district committee candidates with the secretary of state;  
11 provided, that nomination papers for local candidates shall be retained by the local board.

12 (c) If any candidate or an individual presenting written authorization from the candidate,  
13 or the chairperson of any party committee questions the validity or authenticity of any signature on  
14 the nomination paper, the local board shall immediately and summarily decide the question, and  
15 for this purpose, shall have the same powers as are conferred upon the board by the provisions of  
16 § 17-14-14.

17 (d) If any challenged signature is found to be invalid, for any reason in law, or forged, then  
18 the signature shall not be counted.

19 (e) The local canvassing clerk shall immediately notify the state board in writing and via  
20 electronic mail if the local canvassing clerk suspects a consistent pattern of forgery as prescribed  
21 by § 17-23-17 on the nomination papers of a local, state, or federal candidate.

22 (1) The state board, upon notification of allegations of any consistent pattern of suspected  
23 forged signatures on nomination papers of a local, state, or federal candidate, shall review the  
24 allegations and, if determined to be with reasonable cause, shall, as soon as feasible notify all  
25 corresponding local canvassing clerks of the allegations of suspected forgery.

26 (2) The state board, if it deems necessary, shall order a review of all nomination papers of  
27 a local, state, or federal candidate whose nomination papers include a consistent pattern of  
28 suspected forged signatures as prescribed in this subsection. The state board, in consultation with  
29 the Elections Committee of the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks' Association, shall promulgate  
30 rules and regulations on the process to review nomination papers of a local, state, or federal  
31 candidate whose nomination papers include a consistent pattern of suspected forged signatures as  
32 prescribed in this subsection.

33 (3) The state board shall explicitly determine and deliver, in writing and via electronic mail  
34 to the secretary of state, the findings of the review of the local, state, or federal candidate whose

1 nomination papers include suspected forged signatures as prescribed in this subsection, and whether  
2 the determination affects a candidate's qualification for a position on the ballot.

3 **17-14-12. Filing of nomination papers.**

4 All nomination papers for state offices or officers and all certified lists of candidates for  
5 local offices or officers shall be filed in the office of the secretary of state (the certified lists by the  
6 respective local boards), not later than ~~fifty-four (54)~~ eight-four (84) days before the date of the  
7 primary held to nominate candidates for general election; but when there is a primary to nominate  
8 candidates for any office mentioned in § 17-15-7 to be voted upon at a special election for state and  
9 local office, all nomination papers and lists of local candidates shall be filed in the office on or  
10 before the twenty-sixth (26th) day preceding the day of the special primary election, or when there  
11 is a primary to nominate candidates for any office listed in § 17-15-7 to be voted upon at a special  
12 election for federal office, all nomination papers and lists of local candidates shall be filed in the  
13 office on or before the forty-ninth (49th) day preceding the day of the special primary election.  
14 Nomination papers for independent presidential candidates and presidential candidates of political  
15 parties other than those defined in § 17-1-2(9) shall be filed in the office of the secretary of state  
16 by the local boards of canvassers not later than ~~fifty-four (54)~~ eight-four (84) days before the date  
17 of the election.

18 SECTION 2. Section 17-15-1 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-15 entitled "Primary  
19 Elections" is hereby amended to read as follows:

20 **17-15-1. Date of primaries.**

21 A primary election for the nomination of candidates for each political party shall be held  
22 in each voting district in the manner provided in this chapter on the ~~eighth~~ second Tuesday  
23 ~~preceding biennial state elections~~ after the first Monday in September in each even numbered year.

24 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2027

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

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RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- NOMINATION OF PARTY AND INDEPENDENT  
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1           This act would set an earlier deadline from June to April for filing of declaration of  
2           candidacy and nomination papers. It would delay the filing of nomination papers from fifty-four  
3           (54) days to eighty-four (84) days, before the date of the primary. It would also change the date of  
4           primary elections, from the eighth Tuesday preceding the biennial state elections to the second  
5           Tuesday.

6           This act would take effect on January 1, 2027

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