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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

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A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS -- BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Introduced By: Senator Erin Lynch Prata

Date Introduced: January 30, 2020

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Board of Elections)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 17-9.1-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-9.1 entitled
2 "Registration of Voters" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-9.1-8. Registration at designated agencies.**

4 (a) Every person who is or may be by the next general election qualified to vote may
5 register to vote when being discharged from incarceration or when applying for services or
6 assistance at any of the following offices:

7 (1) Any office in the state that provides public assistance;

8 (2) At or through any offices in the state that provide state funded programs primarily
9 engaged in providing services to persons with disabilities;

10 (3) At armed forces recruitment offices, subject to procedures developed by the state
11 board in cooperation with the United States Department of Defense;

12 (4) At or through the department of corrections; and

13 (5) At any other agencies within the state that shall be determined by the state board.

14 (b) Voter registration agencies designated by the state board may include, but are not
15 limited to:

16 (1) State or local government offices such as public libraries, public schools, offices of
17 city and towns clerks (including marriage license bureaus), fishing and hunting license bureaus,
18 government revenue offices, unemployment compensation offices, and offices not described in
19 subdivision (a)(2) of this section that provide services to persons with disabilities; and

1 (2) Federal and nongovernmental offices, with the agreement of those offices.

2 (c)(1) Persons must be provided this opportunity to register to vote not only at the time of
3 their original application for services, but also when filing any recertification, renewal, or for a
4 change of address relating to those services. Agencies providing voter registration assistance must
5 offer the same degree of assistance to individuals in completing a voter registration form as they
6 offer to individuals in completing the agency's own forms, unless the applicant refuses the
7 assistance.

8 (2) Any person who provides voter registration assistance services in an agency is
9 prohibited from:

10 (i) Seeking to influence an applicant's party preference or party registration;

11 (ii) Displaying any political preference or party allegiance;

12 (iii) Making any statement or taking any action whose purpose or effect is to discourage
13 the applicant from registering to vote; or

14 (iv) Making any statement or taking any action whose purpose or effect is to lead the
15 applicant to believe that a decision whether or not to register has any bearing on the availability
16 of services or benefits or on discharge from incarceration.

17 (d)(1) Those who decline to register to vote must do so in writing or by failing to check a
18 box on a form containing the question: "If you are not registered to vote where you live now,
19 would you like to apply to register to vote here today? yes or no".

20 (2) The declination may be included in the agency application for services or on a
21 separate form provided by the agency, subject to rules and regulations to be adopted by the state
22 board.

23 (3) No information regarding a person's declination to register to vote may be used for
24 any purpose other than voter registration. If an individual does register to vote, the particular
25 agency at which the applicant submits a voter registration application may not be publicly
26 disclosed.

27 (4) The declination form to be used at agencies providing public or publicly funded
28 assistance shall also contain the following statements and information:

29 (i) "Applying to register or declining to register to vote will not affect the amount of
30 assistance that you will be provided by this agency"; or, for those forms made available by the
31 department of corrections. "Applying to register or declining to register to vote will not affect
32 your discharge from incarceration";

33 (ii) "If you do not check either box, you will be considered to have decided not to register
34 to vote at this time." (with "yes" and "no" boxes being provided);

1 (iii) "If you would like help filling out the voter registration application form, we will
2 help you. The decision whether to seek or accept help is yours. You may fill out the application
3 form in private";

4 (iv) "If you believe that someone has interfered with your right to register or to decline to
5 register to vote, your right to privacy in deciding whether to register or in applying to register to
6 vote, or your right to choose your own political party or other political preference, you may file a
7 complaint with the State Board of Elections, ~~50 Branch Avenue, Providence~~ [2000 Plainfield Pike,](#)
8 [Cranston](#), Rhode Island ~~02904~~ [02921](#), (401) 222-2345, (401) 222-2239 TDD";

9 (v) A statement that if the applicant declines to register to vote, his or her decision will
10 remain confidential and be used only for voter registration purposes; and

11 (vi) A statement that if the applicant does register to vote, information regarding the
12 agency to which the application was submitted will remain confidential, to be used only for voter
13 registration purposes.

14 (e)(1) The registration form to be provided in these agencies shall be the mail registration
15 form adopted by the state board. Unless the registrant refuses to permit the agency to transmit the
16 form to the state board or local board where the applicant resides, the agency shall transmit the
17 completed registration form to the state board or any local board. However, if the registrant
18 refuses, the registrant may either mail the form to the state board or any local board or may
19 provide for delivery of the form to the state board or any local board either in person or through a
20 third party. It shall be the responsibility of all state or state funded agencies to have available at
21 all times a sufficient number of voter registration forms in order to carry out the provisions of this
22 section.

23 (2) Unless the applicant refuses to permit the agency to transmit the completed voter
24 registration form to the state board or to a local board, the agency shall be required to transmit the
25 registration form within ten (10) days after acceptance, or if accepted on the last day or within
26 five (5) days before the last day to register for an election, within five (5) days of acceptance.

27 (f) The department of corrections and each agency designated by the board to register
28 persons to vote when applying for services or assistance shall report to the state board:

29 (1) The number of persons applying for services and assistance or the number of persons
30 discharged from incarceration following felony convictions who are eligible to vote;

31 (2) The number of persons who have been registered to vote at that agency;

32 (3) The number of forms that have been transmitted by the agency to the state or local
33 board; and

34 (4) The number of persons who have declined to register to vote at that agency. Reports

1 to the state board by each designated agency shall be on a quarterly basis.

2 (g) Any person who has fully and correctly completed an application to register to vote at
3 a designated agency is presumed to be registered as of the date of the acceptance of the
4 registration by the designated agency, subject to verification of the registration by the state board
5 or any local board as provided in § 17-9.1-25.

6 (h) If a voter registration agency which is primarily engaged in providing services to
7 persons with disabilities provides those services at the person's home, the agency shall provide
8 the voter registration services authorized by this section at the person's home.

9 (i) The state board of elections shall have the authority to adopt regulations to implement
10 and administer the provisions of this section, including all registrations taken at designated
11 agencies.

12 (j) In cases where the findings required by subdivision 17-6-1.2(a)(4) have been made,
13 transmission shall be made by electronic means as prescribed by the secretary of state, and shall
14 be in an electronic form compatible with the voter registration system maintained by the secretary
15 of state.

16 SECTION 2. Section 17-20-19 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-20 entitled "Mail
17 Ballots" is hereby amended to read as follows:

18 **17-20-19. Envelopes for return of ballots.**

19 Envelopes for the enclosure and return of mail ballots and their enclosing certified
20 envelope shall have the printed or written address: "Board of Elections, ~~50 Branch Ave.,~~
21 ~~Providence~~ 2000 Plainfield Pike, Cranston, Rhode Island ~~02904-2790~~ 02921"; and shall be
22 forwarded by the secretary of state to each mail voter whose application for the mail ballot has
23 been received and accepted.

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 ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS -- BOARD OF ELECTIONS

1 This act would correct the address of the Board of Elections, for purposes of voter
2 registrations and mail ballots, due to their relocation from Providence to Cranston.

3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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