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S T A T E O F R H O D E I S L A N D

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- NOMINATION OF PARTY AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

Introduced By: Senators LaMountain, Ciccone, Lawson, Bissaillon, Burke, and McKenney

Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Secretary of State)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 17-14-1, 17-14-4, 17-14-11, 17-14-12, 17-14-13 and 17-14-14 of
2 the General Laws in Chapter 17-14 entitled "Nomination of Party and Independent Candidates" are
3 hereby amended to read as follows:

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

5 ~~During the last consecutive Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in June in In~~ the even years
6 on the seventy-seventh (77th) and seventy-eighth (78th) day before the primary election held on
7 the ninth (9th) Tuesday preceding biennial general statewide elections, or on the seventy-eighth
8 (78th) and seventy-ninth (79th) day before a biennial statewide primary election held on the
9 Wednesday after Labor Day pursuant to § 17-15-1, and during the thirty-ninth (39th) and fortieth
10 (40th) days preceding a primary election for a special election for state or local office, or for an
11 election for state or local office regularly scheduled for a time other than the biennial general
12 statewide election, or during the sixty-seventh (67th) and sixty-eighth (68th) days preceding a
13 primary election for a special election for federal office, or for an election for federal office
14 regularly scheduled for a time other than the biennial general statewide election, each voter desiring
15 to be a candidate at the upcoming primary or an independent candidate on final nomination papers
16 shall, on a form that shall be provided by the secretary of state, file a declaration of their candidacy
17 not later than four o'clock (4:00) p.m. of the last day for the filing with the secretary of state for
18 congressional and statewide general offices, or with the local board of the place of the candidate's

1 voting residence for general assembly, or state committee or senatorial and representative district
2 committee, or with the appropriate local board for local officers. Notwithstanding the foregoing, if
3 the first day declarations are due is a holiday, the declarations shall be filed on the next two (2)
4 subsequent business days. The declaration shall be signed by the candidate as the candidate's name
5 appears on the voting list. The signature shall be accepted as valid if it can be reasonably identified
6 to be the name and signature of the voter it purports to be. A variation of the voter's signature by
7 the insertion or omission of identifying titles or by the substitution of initials for the first or middle
8 names or both shall not in itself be grounds for invalidation of the signature. The declaration shall
9 also include the following information:

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

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

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

15 (4) The office sought;

16 (5) The place and date of birth;

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

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

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

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

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

1 **17-14-4. Preparation of nomination papers for candidates — Combination of**
2 **endorsed candidates — Furnishing of nomination papers to candidates.**

3 (a) Upon receipt of the declarations referred to in § 17-14-1, within two (2) business days
4 of the final date for filing endorsements, the secretary of state for statewide candidates and the local
5 board for general assembly and local candidates shall prepare nomination papers for each person
6 who has filed a declaration of candidacy as provided in § 17-14-1; provided that, in years when
7 there is a holiday during the declaration of a candidacy, endorsement, or nomination paper
8 preparation period, the nomination papers shall be furnished to candidates within one business day.
9 A minimum of three (3) sets of nomination papers shall be prepared for each candidate whose name
10 appears on nomination papers containing the name of a candidate for general assembly and for
11 local office. Nomination papers for voters from the city of Providence for the offices enumerated
12 in § 17-14-1 shall be furnished by the secretary of state. Nomination papers shall be prepared with
13 the name of the candidate as it appears on the voting list, notwithstanding that the candidate may
14 have signed their declaration of candidacy other than as the candidate's name appears on the voting
15 list. Candidates for nomination for different offices endorsed by the appropriate committee of any
16 party shall be combined on the same nomination papers. The names of candidates for different
17 offices not endorsed by the appropriate committee of any party shall not be combined on the same
18 nomination papers. Nomination papers for candidates for general assembly shall be furnished by
19 the local board of the general assembly candidate. Nomination papers shall be furnished to the local
20 boards by the secretary of state and each shall bear the imprint of the state coat of arms and any
21 additional language required by law. Nomination papers shall be appropriately marked or color
22 coded to indicate the different political parties, the endorsed and unendorsed candidates of those
23 parties, and independent candidates.

24 (b) Candidates for nomination may, at their own expense, have nomination papers
25 duplicated in exact appearance and as prescribed in subsection (a) of this section.

26 (c) Nomination papers furnished by the secretary of state shall be personally issued to the
27 candidate, or in the case of combined nomination papers to one of the candidates, for whom they
28 were prepared, or to an individual presenting written authorization from the candidate, or one of
29 the candidates appearing on them, to receive the nomination papers.

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)~~ sixty-first (61st) day before the primary to the local
33 board of the city or town where the signers appear to be voters or, in the case of special elections
34 for state and local office, on the twenty-eighth (28th) day before the primary, or in the case of

1 special elections for federal office, on the fifty-third (53rd) day before the primary. Nomination
2 papers for independent presidential candidates and presidential candidates of political parties, other
3 than those defined in § 17-1-2(9), shall be filed not later than ~~sixty-(60)~~ sixty -seven (67) days prior
4 to the general election. Each local board shall immediately proceed to check signatures on each
5 nomination paper filed with it against the voting list as last canvassed or published according to
6 law.

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

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

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

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

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

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

34 (3) The state board shall explicitly determine and deliver, in writing and via electronic mail

1 to the secretary of state, the findings of the review of the local, state, or federal candidate whose
2 nomination papers include suspected forged signatures as prescribed in this subsection, and whether
3 the determination affects a candidate's qualification for a position on the ballot.

4 **17-14-12. Filing of nomination papers.**

5 All nomination papers for state offices or officers and all certified lists of candidates for
6 local offices or officers shall be filed in the office of the secretary of state (the certified lists by the
7 respective local boards), not later than ~~fifty-four (54)~~ fifty-five (55) days before the date of the
8 primary held to nominate candidates for general election; but when there is a primary to nominate
9 candidates for any office mentioned in § 17-15-7 to be voted upon at a special election for state and
10 local office, all nomination papers and lists of local candidates shall be filed in the office on or
11 before the twenty-sixth (26th) day preceding the day of the special primary election, or when there
12 is a primary to nominate candidates for any office listed in § 17-15-7 to be voted upon at a special
13 election for federal office, all nomination papers and lists of local candidates shall be filed in the
14 office on or before the forty-ninth (49th) day preceding the day of the special primary election.
15 Nomination papers for independent presidential candidates and presidential candidates of political
16 parties other than those defined in § 17-1-2(9) shall be filed in the office of the secretary of state
17 by the local boards of canvassers not later than ~~fifty-four (54)~~ sixty-one (61) days before the date
18 of the election.

19 **17-14-13. Objections to eligibility of candidate or sufficiency of papers.**

20 When nomination papers have been duly filed and are in apparent conformity with § 17-
21 14-11, they shall be conclusively presumed to be valid, unless written objections to them are made
22 as to the eligibility of the candidate or the sufficiency of the nomination papers or the signatures on
23 them. All objections for local candidates shall be filed at the local board by four o'clock (4:00) p.m.
24 on the fifty-sixth (56th) day before the primary. All objections for federal and state candidates shall
25 be filed in the office of the secretary of state ~~or of the local board, as the case may be,~~ by four
26 o'clock (4:00) p.m. on the ~~next business day after the last day fixed for filing nomination papers in~~
27 ~~the appropriate office as provided in this chapter~~ fifty-fourth (54th) day before the primary. Nothing
28 in this section shall be construed to prevent the secretary of state or the local board, as the case may
29 be, from disqualifying a candidate based on the determination of the secretary of state or the local
30 board, acting on its own motion, that the candidate is ineligible or the nomination papers or the
31 signatures on them are invalid or insufficient.

32 **17-14-14. Hearings on objections — Witnesses — Notice.**

33 (a) All objections to nomination papers which are required to be filed with the secretary of
34 state shall be considered by the state board. The secretary of state shall, when requested by the state

1 board, immediately deliver to the board the nomination papers to which objection has been filed.
2 The state board may, at the hearing on the objections, summon witnesses, administer oaths, and
3 require the production of books, papers, and documents. The witnesses shall be summoned in the
4 same manner, be paid the same fees, and be subject to the same penalties for default as witnesses
5 before the superior court. A summons may be sworn to and an oath may be administered by the
6 board. When an objection has been filed, notice of the objection shall be immediately given by
7 registered or certified mail or by personal service by the state board to the candidates, addressed to
8 the residence of the candidate as given in the nomination papers, and to any party committee
9 interested in the nomination to which objection is made. The state board shall promulgate rules and
10 regulations on challenges to nomination papers filed by any candidate, an individual presenting
11 written authorization from the candidate, or the chairperson of any party committee that questions
12 the validity or authenticity of any signature on the nomination paper of a candidate.

13 (b) Additional notice may also be given by the state board if it sees fit to do so. The decision
14 of the board shall be rendered within two (2) days for nomination papers for candidates
15 participating in a primary election and thirty-five (35) days for nomination papers for candidates
16 not participating in a primary election, exclusive of Sundays and holidays, after filing of objections
17 and shall immediately be certified by the state board to the secretary of state.

18 (c) All objections to nomination papers other than state and federal candidates shall be
19 considered by the local board in the same manner and with the same effect as provided in subsection
20 (a) of this section for hearing of objections to nomination papers for state and federal candidates
21 by the state board.

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

24 **17-15-1. Date of primaries.**

25 A primary election for the nomination of candidates for each political party shall be held
26 in each voting district in the manner provided in this chapter on the eighth ninth (9th) Tuesday
27 preceding biennial state elections. Provided, however, that if the ninth (9th) Tuesday is the day after
28 Labor Day, then the primary election shall be held on the next day, the Wednesday.

29 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2028.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- NOMINATION OF PARTY AND INDEPENDENT
CANDIDATES

- 1 This act would amend several statutes relating to elections and the dates for primaries and
- 2 dates within which to file nomination papers and object to nomination papers.
- 3 This act would take effect on January 1, 2028.

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