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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- LOCAL CANVASSING AUTHORITIES

Introduced By: Senators Bissaillon, LaMountain, Gallo, and Dimitri

Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 17-8-1, 17-8-2 and 17-8-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-8
2 entitled "Local Canvassing Authorities" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-8-1. Appointment of bipartisan authority.**

4 (a) The legislative body of each city and town shall appoint a bipartisan canvassing
5 authority of three (3) qualified electors of the city or town, not more than two (2) of whom shall
6 belong to the same political party, and may appoint two (2) alternate members, not more than one
7 of whom shall belong to the same political party. At any meeting of the canvassing authority at
8 which a member is to be absent, the member may request that an alternate replace him or her for
9 that meeting; provided, that the alternate member must be of the same political party as the member.
10 The mayor, in cities and towns that elect a mayor, or the president of the city or town council, in
11 cities and towns with no elected mayor, shall, within thirty (30) days of receipt of lists, nominate
12 the members of the canvassing authority from lists of party voters submitted by the respective
13 chairpersons of the city or town political committee, which lists shall contain the names of five (5)
14 times the number of persons to be appointed. If the legislative body refuses to approve the
15 nomination of any person to the canvassing authority, the mayor or the president shall submit to
16 the legislative body, within thirty (30) days of the refusal, another person named on one of the lists,
17 and so on until a person is appointed. If the chairperson of the city or town committee of a political
18 party entitled to an appointment fails or refuses to submit a list, within thirty (30) days of notice of
19 a vacancy, the mayor or the council president, as the case may be, shall nominate any party voter

1 of the political party entitled to the appointment.

2 (b) In any instance in which a vacancy occurs and the remaining two (2) members of the
3 canvassing authority each belong to different political parties, the respective chairpersons of any
4 recognized city or town political party committee that has duly filed an organization with the
5 canvassing authority, in accordance with § 17-12-9, shall each be entitled to submit a list, and the
6 mayor or the council president, as the case may be, shall nominate any party voter from any of the
7 submitted lists, in accordance with the procedures of subsection (a) of this section.

8 **17-8-2. Term and qualifications for office.**

9 (a) Each member of a local canvassing authority shall be appointed to serve for a term of
10 six (6) years beginning on the first Monday of March succeeding the date of his or her appointment
11 and until his or her successor is elected and qualified. No person shall be appointed or serve as a
12 member of the authority who is an officer or employee of the United States or of this state, or who
13 is an officer or employee of the authority's city or town; provided, that in any city a member of the
14 authority may be employed as its clerk. Any member of the authority who becomes a candidate for
15 election to any public office and who fails to file a declination of the candidacy within the time
16 allowed by law shall be disqualified from holding membership upon the authority and his or her
17 successor shall be immediately elected.

18 (b) The fixed six (6) year terms of members of a local canvassing authority shall expire on
19 a staggered basis on the first Monday of March in odd-numbered year. If the term expiration dates
20 on record for any canvassing authority members are found to be in noncompliance with the
21 provisions of this section, the town or city clerk shall provide written notice of the correction to the
22 canvassing authority and any affected member and shall amend the official records to reflect the
23 corrected term expiration date.

24 (c) The fixed six (6) year terms of alternates of a local canvassing authority shall expire on
25 the first Monday of March in any odd-numbered year.

26 **17-8-5. Local boards — Powers and duties — Quorum.**

27 (a) Each canvassing authority shall have and exercise the functions, powers, and duties
28 provided for local boards by this title or by any law not inconsistent with this title. It shall:

29 (1) Select one of its members as presiding officer and another as clerk of the board;
30 provided, that nothing in this title shall be deemed to affect the powers and duties of the town clerk
31 who shall be ex officio the clerk of the respective town canvassing authorities; and provided,
32 further, that in the cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport, Woonsocket, Cranston, and
33 Warwick, the clerk shall be designated at the time of his or her election or appointment;

34 (2) Have and discharge all of the functions, powers, and duties of the town council

1 concerning nominations, elections, registration of voters and canvassing rights, the preparing and
2 correcting of voting lists, and other related matters, which powers are transferred to the local board;

3 (3) Make or furnish all returns or other things required by law to be made or furnished to
4 or by city clerks, boards of canvassers, and district clerks, relative to any matter within the purview
5 of this title;

6 (4) Appoint and employ all its necessary clerical and technical assistants and fix the
7 compensation of each person appointed, within the limits of funds available to it pursuant to law;
8 provided, that in the cities of Cranston and Woonsocket and the town of Coventry the employment
9 and compensation shall be subject to the approval of the respective city or town councils.

10 (5) The town or city clerk, or designee, in municipalities where the town or city clerk is by
11 law, charter, or ordinance charged with the functions of election administration, shall be the chief
12 local election official, primary administrative contact, and liaison from the canvassing authority
13 and local board to the secretary of state and to the state board of elections, except in towns and
14 cities where an election office, separate from the town or city clerk, is charged with election
15 administration, said chief local election official shall be designated by the local board and shall
16 hold the same duties. The chief local election official, upon taking office as city or town clerk, or
17 upon designation by the local board, as the case may be, shall designate an alternate local election
18 official, and shall at all times provide and maintain emergency contact information for, at minimum,
19 the chief local election official, the alternate local election official, and the chairperson of the board
20 of canvassers on file with the secretary of state and state board of elections; and

21 (6) The chief local election official, under the direction of the local board, shall notify the
22 secretary of state to add, modify, or revoke access to the statewide central voter register for any
23 system users in the municipality who require it in order to carry out the duties imposed on the
24 canvassing authority by this title.

25 (b) A quorum of a local board for the purpose of receiving registrations shall be comprised
26 of one member of the board, and for all other purposes a quorum shall be comprised of two (2)
27 members.

28 SECTION 2. 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 -- LOCAL CANVASSING AUTHORITIES

1 This act would require the respective party chairpersons to submit lists of party voters to
2 the mayor or council president, as the case may be, within thirty (30) days of notice of vacancy, in
3 a municipal election office and would require the mayor or council president to make a nomination
4 for a replacement to the council within thirty (30) days of receipt of the lists. It would also clarify
5 the term expiration dates for canvassing authority members and alternates and would direct the city
6 or town clerk to provide written notice of the corrections and amend the official records, if the term
7 expiration dates on record, are found to be in noncompliance with the provisions of this act. The
8 act would require the local canvassing board to designate a chief local election official, and for that
9 designee to designate an alternate local election official and would further establish that the chief
10 local election official is the only agent authorized to request user access to the statewide central
11 voter register, via the secretary of state.

12 This act would take effect on January 1, 2027.

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