

2024 -- H 7849 AS AMENDED

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LC005579
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS

Introduced By: Representative Lauren H. Carson

Date Introduced: March 01, 2024

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

(Board of Elections)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 17-20-22.1 of the General Laws in Chapter 17-20 entitled "Mail
2 Ballots" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **17-20-22.1. Mail ballot drop boxes.**

4 (a) "Drop box" means the locked and secure container established and maintained by the
5 board of elections, in accordance with this section, that shall serve as a receptacle for the receipt of
6 mail and emergency ballots cast by voters. Every drop box established by the board of elections
7 shall be deemed to be the property of the board of elections and shall be accessible to the public,
8 beginning ~~twenty (20)~~ thirty-five (35) days prior to the date of ~~a state election and statewide or~~
9 federal elections; and provided, further, that the drop boxes shall be accessible beginning twenty
10 (20) days prior to all special elections held under title 17, available twenty-four (24) hours per day
11 and seven (7) days per week throughout this period, if established outside a municipal building,
12 and during the normal business hours of the facility if established inside a municipal building. All
13 drop boxes must be accessible on election day, from the time polls open until the time they close,
14 in accordance with §§ 17-18-10 and 17-18-11. Any ballot that is cast by a voter, as either a mail
15 ballot or emergency ballot, and is deposited into a drop box on or before the close of polls on
16 election day, shall be deemed to be received by and in the possession of the board of elections. At
17 the close of polls on election day, upon the last ballot deposited by any person in line at that time,
18 a designated agent of the board of elections shall lock the ballot slot of the drop box to ensure that
19 no other ballots are deposited in the drop box; provided, further, if there is another election

1 [scheduled to be held under title 17 in the city or town within thirty-five \(35\) days after the drop box](#)
2 [is locked pursuant to this section, the drop box shall be reopened, if applicable, the following day](#)
3 [at 8:30 am.](#)

4 (b) Drop boxes must be labeled “State of Rhode Island Official Ballot Drop Box for Mail
5 Ballots,” and include language about postage and display the official seal of the board of elections.
6 Drop boxes must be accessible by persons with disabilities. Drop boxes shall be monitored by a
7 video surveillance system.

8 (c) No town or city shall have fewer than one drop box. A drop box may be established
9 inside a municipal building, only if the building remains open and accessible to the public
10 throughout the prescribed time period prior to election day and until the close of the polls, in
11 accordance with § 17-18-10. A drop box shall also be placed outside the office of the board of
12 elections and the election division of the office of the secretary of state. Drop boxes must be placed
13 in locations that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

14 (d) Each local board of canvassers shall determine the location of every drop box located
15 within the geographic area over which that local board has authority, in accordance with the
16 regulations promulgated by the board of elections.

17 (e) Each drop box shall not accept the deposit of mail ballots after the last person in line to
18 deposit a ballot in that drop box at the time the polls close, on the day of the election, has deposited
19 their ballot.

20 (f) Each local board shall make the location of every drop box within the area over which
21 it has authority publicly available on its website, to the extent feasible. The board of elections shall
22 make the location of all drop boxes located within the state publicly available at its office and on
23 its website.

24 (g) The board of elections shall designate one or more staff members of each local board
25 of canvassers as the official agents of the board of elections, for purposes of retrieving ballots
26 deposited in drop boxes and establish a schedule and process by which drop boxes are regularly
27 emptied and any ballots they contain are securely and promptly transported to the board of
28 elections.

29 (h) The board of elections shall promulgate regulations consistent with this section,
30 including regulations for the location of drop boxes and the receipt, storage, security, regular
31 collection, and transportation of the mail ballots returned.

32 (i) The board of elections may promulgate regulations for the use of drop boxes for
33 depositing mail ballot applications during the applicable timeframe for accepting mail ballot
34 applications.

1 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS

- 1 This act would require mail ballot drop boxes to be opened thirty-five (35) days prior to
- 2 election day, and twenty (20) days prior to special elections.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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