

1 Introduced by Committee on Government Operations

2 Date:

3 Subject: Elections; voting by mail; voting drop boxes; polling places;  
4 candidate nicknames; election procedures; ballot curing

5 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes miscellaneous  
6 changes to State elections procedures, including permitting the early  
7 processing of early and absentee ballots; adding provisions for ballot curing  
8 and secure ballot drop boxes; establishing requirements around outdoor polling  
9 places and the use of candidate names on a ballot; and creating a new position  
10 at the Secretary of State's office.

11 An act relating to State election procedures

12 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

13 \* \* \* Candidate Nicknames \* \* \*

14 Sec. 1. 17 V.S.A. § 2361 is amended to read:

15 § 2361. CONSENT OF CANDIDATE

16 (a) A candidate for whom petitions containing sufficient valid signatures  
17 have been filed shall file with the official with whom the petitions were filed a  
18 consent to the printing of the candidate's name on the ballot. The Secretary of  
19 State shall prepare and furnish forms for this purpose.

1 (b)(1) The consent shall set forth the name of the candidate, as the  
2 candidate wishes to have it printed on the ballot, the candidate’s town of  
3 residence, and correct mailing address.

4 (2) If a candidate wishes to use a nickname, the format on the ballot  
5 shall be the candidate’s first name, the nickname set off in quotations, and the  
6 candidate’s last name.

7 (A) A nickname of one or two words by which the candidate has  
8 been commonly known for at least three years preceding the election may be  
9 used in combination with a candidate’s name. A nickname that constitutes a  
10 slogan or otherwise indicates a political, economic, social, or religious view or  
11 affiliation may not be used.

12 (B) A nickname may not be used unless the candidate executes and  
13 files with the application for a place on the ballot an affidavit indicating that  
14 the nickname complies with this subsection.

15 (3) Professional titles such as “Dr.,” “Esq.,” or “CPA” shall not be used  
16 as part of a candidate’s name on the ballot.

17 (c) The consent shall be filed on or before the day petitions are due. Unless  
18 a consent is filed, the candidate’s name shall not be printed on the primary  
19 ballot.

1                   \* \* \* Outdoor and Drive-up Polling Places \* \* \*

2           Sec. 2. 17 V.S.A. § 2502 is amended to read:

3           § 2502. LOCATION OF POLLING PLACES; OUTDOOR POLLING  
4                   PLACES

5           (a) Each polling place shall be located in a public place within the town.

6           (b) Outdoor polling places. A polling place may be located outdoors if it  
7           can be operated in a manner consistent with the provisions of this chapter.

8                   (1) The board of civil authority shall designate the outdoor area that  
9           comprises the “polling place” for purposes of restrictions and requirements for  
10           polling places imposed pursuant to this chapter, including the restrictions on  
11           campaigning and other activities within the building containing the polling  
12           place described in subdivisions 2508(a)(1)(A) and (B) of this subchapter.

13                   (2) An indoor polling place alternative must be available at or near the  
14           same physical location as the outdoor polling place in case of inclement  
15           weather. If conditions require use of the indoor alternative, the Secretary of  
16           State’s office shall be notified immediately of the change.

17                   (3) Candidates and members of the public who would otherwise be  
18           allowed to campaign outside an indoor polling place must be kept a reasonable  
19           distance from the outdoor polling place such that any campaigning does not  
20           disrupt or interfere in any way with the voting process.

1        (c) Drive-up voting. Voting may be conducted by a drive-through or drive-  
2        up voting method at a polling place if the voting process can be operated in a  
3        manner consistent with the provisions of this chapter.

4            (1) Drive-up voting procedures shall enable voters to complete the  
5        voting process without leaving their vehicle, allowing the voters to deposit  
6        their ballot directly into a tabulator or secure ballot box that may be brought to  
7        the window of the vehicle or located in such a manner that it can be accessed  
8        from the vehicle, or providing voters an envelope or folder in which to place  
9        their voted ballot before handing it to an election official for processing.

10           (2) Polling places conducting drive-up voting shall also accommodate  
11        walk-in voters and those using other forms of transport.

12        (d) Ballot transfer. If a polling place is outside or if voting is conducted by  
13        a drive-up method, ballots may be periodically transferred from a secure  
14        outdoor or drive-up ballot box to another secure container for counting after  
15        the close of the polls or to election officials who are processing ballots through  
16        the tabulator. Any such transfer shall be done in the presence of two election  
17        officials, if possible officials of different parties.

18        ~~(b)~~(e) Access. The accessible voting system must be available for those  
19        who request it. Additionally, The the board of civil authority shall take such  
20        measures as are necessary to assure that voters who are elders or have a  
21        disability may conveniently and secretly cast their votes. Measures that may

1 be taken shall include: location of polling places on the ground floor of a  
2 building; providing ramps, elevators, or other facilities for access to the polling  
3 place; providing a stencil overlay for ballots; providing a separate polling place  
4 with direct communication to the main polling place; and permitting election  
5 officials to carry a ballot to an elder or to a person who has a disability in order  
6 to permit that person to mark the ballot while in a motor vehicle adjacent to the  
7 polling place. For purposes of this subsection, the board of civil authority shall  
8 have full jurisdiction on the day of an election over the premises at which a  
9 polling place is located.

10 ~~(e)~~(f) Polling place designation.

11 (1) Thirty days prior to a local, primary, or general election, the town  
12 clerk shall submit to the Secretary of State a list of polling places within the  
13 municipality that will be used in that election. The list shall include the name  
14 of the polling location, its physical address, and the time the polling place will  
15 open.

16 (2)(A) A municipality may change the location of a polling place less  
17 than 30 days prior to an election only in cases of emergency. If a municipality  
18 changes the location of a polling place less than 30 days prior to the election,  
19 the town clerk shall notify the Secretary of State within 24 hours of the change  
20 and provide the new polling place information.

1 (B) The Secretary of State shall assist any municipality that needs to  
2 change the location of a polling place on the day of an election due to an  
3 emergency, including assisting in finding a new location and informing the  
4 public of that new location.

5 (C) The Secretary of State shall inform the State chairs of Vermont's  
6 major political parties of any changes made to polling places that he or she is  
7 aware of made less than 30 days prior to an election.

8 (3) The Secretary of State shall provide on his or her official website a  
9 list of polling places that will be used in any local, primary, or general election  
10 within the State, and shall specifically provide notice on that website of any  
11 change in the location of a municipality's polling place.

12 \* \* \* Ballot Mailing for Local Elections \* \* \*

13 Sec. 3. 17 V.S.A. § 2680 is amended to read:

14 § 2680. AUSTRALIAN BALLOT SYSTEM; GENERAL

15 (a) Application. Unless specifically required by statute, the provisions of  
16 the Australian ballot system shall not apply to the annual or special meeting of  
17 a municipality unless that municipality, at its annual meeting or at a special  
18 meeting called for that purpose, votes to have them apply.

19 \* \* \*

1 (f) Presiding officer. The presiding officer for any election or part of an  
2 election using the Australian ballot system shall be the town clerk or as  
3 otherwise provided in section 2452 of this title.

4 (g) Early and absentee voting. At the time the Australian ballots are  
5 available, which shall be not less than 20 days before the election, early and  
6 absentee voting shall be permitted in accordance with chapter 51, subchapter 6  
7 of this title.

8 (1) The legislative body of a town, city, or village may vote to mail a  
9 ballot to all active registered voters in the town, city, or village.

10 (2) A school board may, after receiving the approval of the legislative  
11 body of each member town in the district, vote to mail its annual meeting  
12 ballot to all active registered voters in the district. In such case, the town clerk  
13 and election officials in the member towns shall be responsible for the mailing  
14 of the ballots but all costs associated with the mailing of ballots shall be borne  
15 by the school district.

16 (3) Ballots shall be mailed not less than 20 days before the election, or  
17 as soon as they are available.

18 (4) The mailing of ballots shall be conducted to the extent practicable in  
19 accordance with chapter 51, subchapter 6 of this title.

20 ~~(g)~~(h) Hearing.

1 (1) Whenever a municipality has voted to adopt the Australian ballot  
2 system of voting on any public question or budget, except the budget revote as  
3 provided in subsection (c) of this section, the legislative body shall hold a  
4 public informational hearing on the question by posting warnings at least 10  
5 days in advance of the hearing in at least two public places within the  
6 municipality and in the town clerk’s office.

7 \* \* \*

8 \* \* \* Ballot Mailing for Statewide Elections \* \* \*

9 Sec. 4. 17 V.S.A. § 2532 is amended to read:

10 § 2532. AUTHORIZED APPLICANTS; APPLICATION FORM;

11 DUPLICATES

12 \* \* \*

13 (e) Duplicate early voter absentee ballots.

14 (1)(A) The town clerk may, upon application, issue a duplicate early  
15 voter absentee ballot if the original ballot is lost or not received by the voter  
16 within a reasonable period of time after ~~mailing~~ it is mailed to the voter by the  
17 town clerk or by the Secretary of State’s office pursuant to section 2537a of  
18 this subchapter.

19 (B) The application may be made by a person entitled to apply for an  
20 early voter absentee ballot under subsection (a) of this section and shall be



1 accompanied by a sworn statement affirming that the voter has not received the  
2 original ballot.

3 (2) If a duplicate early voter absentee ballot is issued and both the  
4 duplicate and original early voter absentee ballots are received before the close  
5 of the polls on election day, the ballot ~~with the earlier postmark~~ that is received  
6 first by the town clerk shall be counted and the Elections Division of the  
7 Secretary of State's office shall be notified.

8 \* \* \*

9 Sec. 5. 17 V.S.A. § 2536 is amended to read:

10 § 2536. FURNISHING EARLY VOTER ABSENTEE BALLOT  
11 ENVELOPES

12 Upon request, for any statewide primary, presidential primary, or general  
13 election, the Secretary of State shall furnish the envelopes prescribed in  
14 sections 2535 and 2542 of this title to town clerks in such numbers as they  
15 request. The cost of absentee ballot envelopes for local elections shall be  
16 borne by the municipality.

17 Sec. 6. 17 V.S.A. § 2537 is amended to read:

18 § 2537. EARLY OR ABSENTEE VOTING IN THE TOWN CLERK'S  
19 OFFICE

20 (a)(1) A voter may, if he or she chooses, apply in person to the town clerk  
21 for the early voter absentee ballots and envelopes.

1           (2) In this case, the clerk shall furnish the early voter absentee ballots  
2 and envelopes when a valid application has been made, or at such time as the  
3 clerk receives the ballots, whichever comes first.

4           (3) The voter may:

5                 (A) mark his or her ballots, place them in the envelope, sign the  
6 certificate, and return the ballots in the envelope containing the certificate to  
7 the town clerk or an assistant town clerk without leaving the office of the town  
8 clerk; ~~or~~

9                 (B) take the ballots and return them to the town clerk in the same  
10 manner as if the ballots had been received by mail; or

11                 (C) mark the ballots and deposit them directly into the vote tabulator  
12 or ballot box in accordance with section 2546b of this subchapter.

13           (b) Except for justices of the peace as provided in section 2538 of this  
14 subchapter, a person shall not take any ballot from the town clerk on behalf of  
15 any other person.

16           Sec. 7. 17 V.S.A. § 2537a is added to read:

17           § 2537a. MAILING OF GENERAL ELECTION BALLOTS

18                 (a) For every general election, the Secretary of State's office shall mail a  
19 general election ballot to all active voters on the statewide voter checklist  
20 described in section 2154 of this title.

1           (1) The mailing of the ballots shall commence not later than 43 days  
2           before the election and shall be completed not later than October 1.

3           (2) A postage-paid return envelope, pre-addressed to the town or city  
4           clerk of the town or city where the voter is registered to vote, shall be included  
5           with the ballot sent to every voter in which the ballot may be mailed back to  
6           the clerk. All postage cost shall be paid by the Secretary of State’s office.

7           (3) The address file to be used for the mailing shall be generated from  
8           the statewide voter checklist as close as practicable to the date of the mailing,  
9           and in no case earlier than September 1.

10           (4) The Secretary of State’s office shall include in the mailing to each  
11           voter instructions for return of the voted ballot.

12           (b) General election ballots mailed by the Secretary of State’s office under  
13           this section shall be returned by the voter to the town or city clerk in the town  
14           or city where that voter is registered in accordance with the procedures for  
15           return of ballots described in this subchapter.

16           Sec. 8. 17 V.S.A. § 2539 is amended to read:

17           § 2539. DELIVERY OF EARLY VOTER ABSENTEE BALLOTS

18           (a) Default; town office or mail.

19           (1) Except as provided in subsections (b) and (c) of this section, unless  
20           the early or absentee voter votes in the town clerk’s office as set forth in  
21           section 2537 of this ~~subchapter~~ title, the town clerk shall provide to the early or

1 absentee voter who comes to the town clerk’s office a complete set of early  
2 voter absentee ballots or mail a complete set of early voter absentee ballots to  
3 each early or absentee voter for whom a valid application has been filed.

4 (2) The Except as provided in subdivision (3) of this subsection, the  
5 early voter absentee ballots shall be mailed forthwith upon the filing of a valid  
6 application, or upon the town clerk’s receipt of the necessary ballots,  
7 whichever is later.

8 (3)(A) For any general election, if a voter transfers his or her registration  
9 from another town or city in the state following the mailing of ballots to all  
10 active voters by the Secretary of State’s office pursuant to section 2537a of this  
11 subchapter, before issuing an absentee ballot the clerk shall confirm the status  
12 of the ballot that was previously mailed to that voter by the Secretary of State  
13 and proceed as follows:

14 (i) If the voter has voted and returned the ballot issued to the voter  
15 by the Secretary of State to the town in which they were previously registered,  
16 the voter shall not be issued a ballot nor be allowed to cast another ballot in the  
17 same general election and shall be registered following the election.

18 (ii) If the voter did not receive or did not return the ballot that was  
19 previously sent to the voter by the Secretary of State, the voter may be issued  
20 another ballot for the general election if:



1 ~~4. Mail or deliver the envelope containing the ballots to the town clerk of the~~  
2 ~~town where you are a registered voter in time to arrive not later than election~~  
3 ~~day.~~

4 ~~Note: If these ballots have been brought to you personally by two~~  
5 ~~justices of the peace because of your illness, injury, or disability, just return~~  
6 ~~them to the justices after you have signed the envelope. YOU HAVE THE~~  
7 ~~RIGHT TO MARK YOUR BALLOTS IN PRIVATE — but if you ask for~~  
8 ~~help in filling out the ballots, they will give it to you.~~  
9 ~~BE SURE TO FILL OUT AND SIGN THE CERTIFICATE ON THIS~~  
10 ~~ENVELOPE OR YOUR VOTE WILL NOT COUNT!~~

11 ~~(b) In the case of early absentee voting in a primary, the instructions shall~~  
12 ~~also include appropriate instructions prepared by the Secretary of State for~~  
13 ~~separating and depositing unvoted ballots in a separate envelope provided and~~  
14 ~~clearly marked for that purpose.~~

15 \* \* \* Ballot Curing; Secure Drop Boxes \* \* \*

16 Sec. 10. 17 V.S.A. § 2543 is amended to read:

17 § 2543. RETURN OF BALLOTS

18 (a) After marking the ballots and signing the certificate on the envelope,  
19 the early or absentee voter to whom the same are addressed shall return the  
20 ballots to the clerk of the town in which ~~he or she is a~~ the voter is registered, in  
21 the manner prescribed, except that in the case of a voter to whom ballots are

1 delivered by justices, the ballots shall be returned to the justices calling upon  
2 ~~him or her~~ that voter, and they shall deliver them to the town clerk.

3 (b) Once an early voter absentee ballot has been returned to the clerk in the  
4 envelope with the signed certificate, it shall be stored in a secure place and  
5 shall not be returned to the voter for any reason unless the ballot is deemed  
6 defective under subdivision 2546(a)(2) of this subchapter and the voter  
7 chooses to cure the defect and cast the ballot pursuant to subsection 2547(d) of  
8 this subchapter.

9 (c) If a ballot includes more than one page, the early or absentee voter need  
10 only return the page upon which the voter has marked his or her vote.

11 (d)(1) All early voter absentee ballots returned as follows shall be counted:

12 (A) by any means, to the town clerk's office before the close of  
13 business on the day preceding the election;

14 (B) to any secure ballot drop box provided by the town or city in  
15 which the voter is registered pursuant to section 2543a of this subchapter  
16 before the close of business on the day before the election;

17 ~~(B)(C)~~ by mail, to the town clerk's office before the close of the polls  
18 on the day of the election; and

19 ~~(C)(D)~~ by hand delivery to the presiding officer at the voter's polling  
20 place before the closing of the polls at 7 p.m.

1           (2) An early voter absentee ballot returned in a manner other than those  
2 set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection shall not be counted.

3           Sec. 11. 17 V.S.A. § 2543a is added to read:

4           § 2543a. PROVISION OF SECURE BALLOT DROP BOXES

5           (a) A board of civil authority may vote to install one or more secure  
6 outdoor ballot drop boxes (“drop boxes”) for the return of voted ballots.

7           (b) Drop boxes must be located on municipal property. If a town has only  
8 one drop box, it shall be located on the property of the municipal clerk’s office.

9           (c) Drop boxes must allow for the return of ballots by voters at any time of  
10 day, and must be available for the return of ballots not later than 45 days  
11 before the election.

12           (d) Drop boxes must be installed and maintained in accordance with  
13 guidance issued by the Secretary of State’s office. At a minimum, drop boxes  
14 must:

15           (1) be affixed to a foundation or other immovable object such that they  
16 cannot not be removed without being tampered with;

17           (2) be under 24-hour video surveillance or in the alternative be within  
18 sight of the municipal building;

19           (3) be constructed in such a manner that it is impossible to remove the  
20 ballots without the ballot box being tampered with; and



1           (4) be able to be closed such that ballots may not be deposited once the  
2           deadline for deposit has passed.

3           (e) Ballots may be deposited in the drop boxes until the close of business  
4           on the day before the election. At that time the drop box shall be closed and  
5           instructions affixed to the drop box instructing the voter to return their voted  
6           ballot to the polling place on the day of the election.

7           (f) The Secretary of State’s Office shall provide drop boxes to a town or  
8           city upon request following a vote of the board of civil authority. The  
9           maximum number of drop boxes that the Secretary of State’s office shall  
10          provide in any town or city shall be as follows:

11           (1) up to 5,000 registered voters, one;

12           (2) between 5,000 and 10,000 registered voters, two;

13           (3) between 10,000 and 15,000 registered voters, three;

14           (4) between 15,000 and 20,000 registered voters, four; and

15           (5) over 20,000 registered voters, five.

16           (6) A town or city may have a number of secure drop boxes equal to the  
17          number of representative districts in that town or city, with one drop box  
18          located in each district, if that number is greater than the number allowed  
19          based on that town or city’s number of registered voters in subdivisions (1)–  
20          (5).

21

1 Sec. 12. REPEALS

2 17 V.S.A. § 2545 (receipt of marked ballots by town clerk; delivery to  
3 election officers) is repealed.

4 \* \* \* Ballot Processing and Defective Ballot Notification \* \* \*

5 Sec. 13. 17 V.S.A. § 2546 is amended to read:

6 § 2546. ~~DEPOSIT OF EARLY VOTER ABSENTEE BALLOTS IN~~  
7 BALLOT BOX OR VOTE TABULATOR RECEIPT OF BALLOTS  
8 BY CLERK; VOTER STATUS; OPPORTUNITY TO CURE;  
9 PROCESSING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

10 (a) ~~Not earlier than~~ Beginning 30 days before the opening of the polls on  
11 election day, upon receipt of a mailing envelope containing ballots returned by  
12 a voter, the town clerk may shall, within three business days or on the next day  
13 the office is open for business, whichever is later, direct two election officials  
14 working together to do all of the following:

15 (1) open the ~~outside~~ mailing envelope and sort early voter absentee  
16 ballots by ward and district, if necessary; and

17 (2) determine that the certificate has been ~~properly completed and~~  
18 signed, the voted ballot was placed in the certificate envelope, and the ballot is  
19 not defective for any other reason pursuant to section 2547 of this subchapter.

1           (A) If the ballot is not deemed defective, the clerk shall check the  
2           name of the early voter off the entrance checklist and record the ballot as  
3           received and accepted in the online election management system, and:

4                   (i) place the certificate envelopes into a secure container marked  
5                   “checked in early voter absentee ballots” to be transported to the polling places  
6                   on election day; or

7                   (ii) open the certificate envelope and place the voted ballot in the  
8                   ballot box or tabulator in accordance with the procedures contained in section  
9                   2546a of this subchapter.

10           (B) If the ballot is deemed defective, the clerk shall:

11                   (i) check the name of the early voter off the entrance checklist and  
12                   record the ballot as received and defective in the online election management  
13                   system;

14                   (ii) place the ballot in the defective ballot envelope in accordance  
15                   with the procedures of subdivisions 2547(b)(1)–(3) of this subchapter;

16                   (iii) not later than the next business day mail a postcard, designed  
17                   and provided by the Secretary of State’s office, to the voter at the address  
18                   where the ballot was sent informing the voter that their ballot was deemed  
19                   defective and rejected, the reason it was deemed defective, and the voter’s  
20                   opportunity to correct the error pursuant to subsection 2547(d) of this  
21                   subchapter; or

1                    (iv) alternatively, at the clerk’s discretion, not later than the next  
2                    business day, contact the voter by phone or e-mail to inform them of the status  
3                    of their ballot and their opportunity to correct the error.

4                    (b) Beginning five business days preceding the election, the clerk is not  
5                    required to send a postcard to those voters whose ballots have been deemed  
6                    defective. In these cases, the clerk shall make a reasonable effort to provide  
7                    notice to the voter as soon as possible using any other contact information that  
8                    the clerk has on file and shall record the ballot as rejected-defective in the  
9                    online election management system not later than 24 hours after the ballot is  
10                   deemed defective.

11                   ~~(3) check the name of the early voter off the entrance checklist; and~~

12                   ~~(4) place the certificate envelopes into a secure container marked~~  
13                   ~~“checked in early voter absentee ballots” to be transported to the polling places~~  
14                   ~~on election day.~~

15                   ~~(b)(c)~~ The Processing absentee ballots on election day. If the certificate  
16                   envelopes have not been opened and the voted ballots placed in the ballot box  
17                   or tabulator, the town clerk or presiding officer shall deliver the unopened  
18                   early voter absentee ballots to the election officials at the place where the  
19                   entrance checklist is located. ~~Upon the opening of the polls~~ During the polling  
20                   hours on election day.

1           ~~(1) If the ballots are in a~~ , at the direction of the presiding officer, at  
2           least two election officials shall open the container marked “checked in early  
3           voter absentee ballots,” one election official shall open the certificate  
4           envelopes, turn the certificate side face down, and hand the envelope face  
5           down to a second election official from a different political party, who shall  
6           remove the ballots from the envelopes and deposit them in the ballot box or  
7           vote tabulator.

8           ~~(2) If the ballots have not been previously checked off the entrance~~  
9           ~~checklist and if two election officials, from different political parties,~~  
10          ~~determine that the certificate on the envelope is properly completed and signed~~  
11          ~~by the early voter, the name of the early voter appears on the checklist, and the~~  
12          ~~early voter is not a first time voter in the municipality who registered by mail~~  
13          ~~and is marked on the checklist as requiring additional documentation, the~~  
14          ~~election officials shall mark the checklist, open the certificate envelope, turn~~  
15          ~~the certificate side face down, and hand the envelope face down to a third~~  
16          ~~election official who shall remove the ballots from the envelopes and deposit~~  
17          ~~the ballots in the ballot box or vote tabulator.~~

18          ~~(3)(A) If the early voter is a first time voter who registered by mail or~~  
19          ~~online, two election officials from different political parties shall determine~~  
20          ~~whether the identification required under subdivision 2563(1) of this title has~~  
21          ~~been submitted by the voter. Upon ascertaining that the proper identification~~

1 ~~has been submitted by the voter, the election officials shall mark the checklist,~~  
2 ~~open the certificate envelope, turn the certificate side face down, and hand the~~  
3 ~~envelope face down to a third election official who shall remove the ballots~~  
4 ~~from the envelopes and deposit the ballot in the ballot box or vote tabulator.~~

5 ~~(B) If the proper identification has not been submitted, the ballot~~  
6 ~~shall be treated as a provisional ballot, as provided in subchapter 6A of this~~  
7 ~~chapter.~~

8 ~~(e)~~(d) All early voter absentee ballots shall be commingled with the ballots  
9 of voters who have voted in person.

10 Sec. 14. 17 V.S.A. § 2546a is amended to read:

11 § 2546a. ~~DAY PRECEDING ELECTION;~~ DEPOSIT OF EARLY VOTER  
12 ABSENTEE BALLOTS IN VOTE TABULATOR

13 (a) ~~Generally.~~ Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, ~~if a~~  
14 ~~town will be using a vote tabulator for the registering and counting of votes in~~  
15 ~~the upcoming election and will check in early voter absentee ballots in~~  
16 ~~accordance with subsection 2546(a) of this chapter for that election,~~ the board  
17 of civil authority may vote to permit elections officials to deposit ~~those~~ early  
18 voter absentee ballots that have been processed in accordance with subsection  
19 2546(a) of this subchapter and have not been deemed defective into the vote  
20 tabulator or ballot box in accordance with the provisions of this section and  
21 any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. ~~This~~ Any such depositing of

1 ~~these~~ ballots shall take place at the town clerk's office ~~on the day~~ during the 30  
2 days preceding the election.

3 (b) Notice.

4 ~~(1) If a board of civil authority votes to deposit ballots as described in~~  
5 ~~subsection (a) of this section, the town clerk shall post notice that ballots will~~  
6 ~~be so deposited in at least two public places in the municipality and in or near~~  
7 ~~the town clerk's office not less than 30 nor more than 40 days before the~~  
8 ~~election. If a municipality has more than one polling place and the polling~~  
9 ~~places are not all in the same building, the notice shall be posted in at least two~~  
10 ~~public places within each voting district and in or near the town clerk's office.~~  
11 the process shall be conducted during normal business hours if practicable or,  
12 if conducting the process at a time other than normal business hours, notice of  
13 the date(s), time(s), and location of the processing shall be posted at the clerk's  
14 office and two other public places at least three days in advance.

15 ~~(2) In addition, at least five days before the day preceding the election,~~  
16 ~~the notice shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the~~  
17 ~~municipality and on the municipality's website, if the municipality actively~~  
18 ~~updates its website on a regular basis.~~

19 ~~(3) The notice shall include the date and time for the count, inspection,~~  
20 ~~and depositing of the ballots and the location of the town clerk's office.~~

1 (c) Officials. The town clerk and at least two other election officials, from  
2 different political parties to the extent practicable, shall be present for the  
3 inspection of the sealed certificate envelopes and the processing of the ballots  
4 described in this section.

5 ~~(d) Count and inspection.~~

6 ~~(1) On the day preceding the election, at least one hour prior to~~  
7 ~~depositing the ballots in the vote tabulator, the town clerk and the election~~  
8 ~~officials shall:~~

9 ~~(A) first open the secure container marked “checked in early voter~~  
10 ~~absentee ballots,” count the certificate envelopes containing those ballots, and~~  
11 ~~record the number counted; and~~

12 ~~(B) permit these certificate envelopes to be inspected by members of~~  
13 ~~the public.~~

14 ~~(2) Any early voter absentee ballot that is returned after the expiration of~~  
15 ~~the period for the count and inspection shall be processed on the day of the~~  
16 ~~election in accordance with section 2546 of this subchapter.~~

17 ~~(e) Processing.~~

18 ~~(1) Immediately after the expiration of the period for the count and~~  
19 ~~inspection described in subsection (d) of this section, the town clerk and~~  
20 ~~election officials shall open each certificate envelope containing an early voter~~



1 ~~absentee ballot that was counted under subdivision (d)(1) of this section and~~  
2 ~~deposit each ballot into a vote tabulator.~~

3 ~~(2) The town clerk and the election officials shall ensure that all~~  
4 ~~procedures for handling ballots are followed to the fullest extent practicable.~~

5 ~~(3) At the end of the processing, the town clerk shall verify that the vote~~  
6 ~~tabulator's memory card is locked in place and shall sign a statement verifying~~  
7 ~~how many early voter absentee ballots were counted by the vote tabulator and~~  
8 ~~that the memory card is so locked. The town clerk shall compare the vote~~  
9 ~~tabulator's number of counted ballots to the original count of those ballots~~  
10 ~~described in subdivision (d)(1) of this section.~~

11 ~~(f) Security. The town clerk shall otherwise comply with all provisions of~~  
12 ~~this title relating to the security of the vote tabulator.~~

13 ~~(g) Election day. On the day of the election, when the vote tabulator is~~  
14 ~~turned on at the polling place, the town clerk shall verify that the number of~~  
15 ~~ballots that the vote tabulator displays as having been counted matches the~~  
16 ~~number that the town clerk verified the tabulator counted on the preceding day.~~

17 (d) Processing. The Secretary of State's office shall issue detailed  
18 procedures for conducting the processing of early ballots into the vote tabulator  
19 or ballot box pursuant to this section. A town or city shall follow the  
20 procedures issued by the Secretary of State's office for this purpose.

1       ~~(h)~~(e) Rules. The Secretary of State may adopt rules to implement the  
2 provisions of this section.

3       Sec. 15. 17 V.S.A. § 2546b is amended to read:

4       § 2546b. EARLY VOTING IN TOWN CLERK’S OFFICE; DEPOSIT INTO  
5                   VOTE TABULATOR

6       (a)(1) A board of civil authority may vote to permit its town’s registered  
7 early or absentee voters to vote in the town clerk’s office in the same manner  
8 as those voting on election day by marking their early voter absentee ballots  
9 and depositing them into a vote tabulator or secure ballot box.

10       (2) If a board of civil authority votes to permit early voting as described  
11 in subdivision (1) of this subsection, the town’s process for conducting this  
12 early voting shall conform to the provisions of this section and to procedures  
13 that the Secretary of State shall adopt for this purpose.

14       (b)(1) During business hours in the town clerk’s office, the ballot box or  
15 vote tabulator and ballot bin shall be in a secured area accessible only to  
16 election officials and voters. The vote tabulator unit shall be secured with an  
17 identifiable seal and the ballot box containing voted ballots shall remain locked  
18 at all times and secured with an identifiable seal. Neither seal shall be broken  
19 prior to the time of closing the polls on election day.

1           (2) Once early voting has commenced in the town clerk’s office, the  
2 town clerk or designee shall certify each day in a record prepared for this  
3 purpose that the seals on the vote tabulator and ballot box are intact.

4           (3) When an election official is not present or at times other than  
5 business hours, the ballot box or sealed vote tabulator and ~~ballot box~~ bin shall  
6 be secured in the town clerk’s office vault.

7           (4) The town clerk shall maintain a record of each early or absentee  
8 voter who voted in person in accordance with this section and shall mark these  
9 voters as having voted early in the clerk’s office in the online election  
10 management system.

11           (c) On the day of the election:

12           (1) The ballot box or sealed vote tabulator and ~~sealed ballot boxes~~ ballot  
13 bin shall be transferred to the polling place on election day by two election  
14 officials and shall not be opened until the polls have closed on election day.

15           (2) When the vote tabulator is turned on at the polling place, the town  
16 clerk shall verify that the number of ballots that the vote tabulator displays as  
17 having been counted matches the number of voters who deposited their early  
18 voter absentee ballots in the vote tabulator in accordance with this section and  
19 any early voter absentee ballots that were processed and deposited in the vote  
20 tabulator under section 2546a of this subchapter.

1           (3) All early voter absentee ballots shall be commingled with those  
2 voted at the polls on election day prior to being examined for the purpose of  
3 identifying write-in votes.

4           Sec. 16. 17 V.S.A. § 2547 is amended to read:

5           § 2547. DEFECTIVE BALLOTS

6           (a) If upon examination by the election officials it shall appear that any of  
7 the following defects is present, either the ballot or the unopened certificate  
8 envelope shall be marked “defective” and the ballot shall not be counted:

9                   (1) the identity of the early or absentee voter cannot be determined;

10                   (2) the early or absentee voter is not legally qualified to vote;

11                   (3) the early or absentee voter has voted in person or previously returned  
12 a ballot in the same election;

13                   (4) the certificate is not signed;

14                   (5) the voted ballot is not in the certificate envelope; or

15                   (6) in the case of a primary vote, the early or absentee voter has failed to  
16 return the unvoted primary ballots.

17           (b) Each defective ballot or unopened certificate envelope shall be:

18                   (1) affixed with a note from the presiding officer indicating the reason it  
19 was determined to be defective; and

20                   (2) placed with other such defective ballots in an envelope marked  
21 “Defective Ballots - Voter Checked Off Checklist - Do Not Count”;~~and~~

1           ~~(3) returned in that envelope to the town clerk in the manner prescribed~~  
2 ~~by section 2590 of this chapter.~~

3           (c) The provisions of this section shall be indicated prominently in the early  
4 or absentee voter material prepared by the Secretary of State.

5           (d)(1) If a ballot is deemed defective, the voter shall be notified of the  
6 defect in accordance with the provisions of subdivision 2546(a)(2)(B) of this  
7 subchapter. Upon notification, the voter may cure the defect until the closing  
8 of the polls on election day, by either:

9                   (A) correcting the defect or submitting a new absentee ballot in  
10 person at the clerk’s office or at the polling place on election day; or

11                   (B) requesting a new ballot be mailed to them by the clerk along with  
12 materials for submission of the second ballot.

13           (2)(A) If a voter corrects the defect in accordance with subdivision  
14 (1)(A) of this subsection (d), the clerk shall update the status of the ballot to  
15 “received – accepted in the online election management system.”

16                   (B) If a voter corrects the defect by requesting a new ballot be mailed  
17 to them under subdivision (1)(B) of this subsection (d), the clerk shall enter a  
18 second absentee ballot request and issue date for that voter in the online  
19 election management system.

20           (3) The same voter may cure a ballot deemed defective not more than  
21 twice for any single election.

1                    \* \* \* Voting Early at Clerk's Office \* \* \*

2        Sec. 17. 17 V.S.A. § 2548 is amended to read:

3        § 2548. VOTING IN PERSON

4            (a) Prior to the opening of the polls, the municipal clerk shall provide the  
5        election officials of each polling place with a list of the names of all persons  
6        who have voted early in the clerk's office or marked and returned early voter  
7        absentee ballots, and these persons shall not thereafter vote in person in the  
8        same election.

9            ~~(b)(1) A person who in good faith has received early voter absentee ballots~~  
10        ~~for his or her use but has not yet marked them, if he or she is able to vote in~~  
11        ~~person, may cast the early voter absentee ballots as provided above, or may~~  
12        ~~vote in person after returning the complete set of unmarked ballots, together~~  
13        ~~with the envelope intended for their return, to the presiding officer at the time~~  
14        ~~the voter appears to vote in person.~~

15            ~~(2) If a person does not have his or her absentee ballots to return, the~~  
16        ~~person shall be checked off the checklist and permitted to vote only after~~  
17        ~~completing a sworn affidavit that he or she does not have his or her absentee~~  
18        ~~ballots to return.~~

19            ~~(3) The presiding officer shall return the unused early voter absentee~~  
20        ~~ballots and envelope to the town clerk, who shall make a record of their return~~  
21        ~~on the list of early or absentee voters and treat them as replaced ballots,~~

1 ~~pursuant to section 2568 of this title.~~ A voter who has been issued an early  
2 ballot, either by the Secretary of State’s office pursuant to section 2537a of this  
3 subchapter, or otherwise by the town clerk, but who has not returned their  
4 voted ballot to the clerk, may vote in person at the polling place on election  
5 day.

6 (2) If the voter brings their marked ballot enclosed in the signed  
7 certificate envelope, the voter may submit that certificate envelope containing  
8 the voted ballot to the entrance checklist official for processing along with any  
9 other early or absentee ballots. The voter shall be marked off the checklist and  
10 the clerk shall record that voter as having returned their absentee ballot on  
11 election day in the online election management system.

12 (3) If the voter brings their marked ballot, but it is not enclosed in the  
13 certificate envelope, the voter shall be marked off the checklist and be allowed  
14 to cast that ballot into the ballot box or tabulator in the same manner as other  
15 voters who are voting in the polling place. The clerk shall record any such  
16 voter as having voted in person on election day in the online election  
17 management system.

18 (4) If the voter brings their unmarked ballot, the voter shall be marked  
19 off the checklist and allowed to proceed to a voting booth to mark that ballot  
20 and cast it into the ballot box or tabulator in the same manner as other voters  
21 who are voting in the polling place. The presiding officer may choose to

1 provide any such voter with a new ballot in exchange for the unvoted ballot  
2 that the voter brought to the polls. The clerk shall record any such voter as  
3 having voted in person on election day in the online election management  
4 system.

5 (5) If the voter does not bring their marked or unmarked ballot with  
6 them to the polls, the voter shall be required to sign an affidavit that they have  
7 not previously cast a ballot in the election, and only then shall they be checked  
8 off the checklist and allowed to vote in the same manner as all other voters  
9 who are voting at the polling place. The clerk shall record any such voter as  
10 having voted in person on election day in the online election management  
11 system. Any affidavits signed by voters at the polling place pursuant to this  
12 section shall be retained for a period of 90 days following the election.

13 Sec. 18. 17 V.S.A. § 2565 is amended to read:

14 § 2565. DELIVERY OF BALLOTS

15 As Except as otherwise provided in subsection 2548(b) of this title, as each  
16 voter passes through the entrance of the guardrail, an election official or  
17 officials shall hand him or her one of each kind of ballot. The election officials  
18 shall also answer any questions a voter may ask concerning the process of  
19 voting. The presiding officer shall keep the election officials in charge of  
20 furnishing ballots to voters supplied with a sufficient number of blank ballots,  
21 keeping the remainder of the blank ballots safely secured until needed.



1 Sec. 19. 17 V.S.A. § 2566 is amended to read:

2 § 2566. MARKING BALLOTS

3 ~~On~~ Except as provided in subdivision 2548(b)(2) of this title, on receiving  
4 his or her ballots, the voter shall forthwith, and without leaving the polling  
5 place or going outside the guardrail, proceed to one of the booths not occupied  
6 by any other person and vote by filling in the appropriate square or oval  
7 opposite the name of the candidate of his or her choice for each office, or by  
8 writing in the name of the candidate of his or her choice in the blank space  
9 provided and filling in the square or oval to the right of that blank space.

10 \* \* \* Position Created \* \* \*

11 Sec. 20. CREATION OF POSITION WITHIN THE OFFICE OF  
12 SECRETARY OF STATE; ELECTIONS

13 (a) There is created within the Secretary of State’s office one new position  
14 in the Elections Division.

15 (b) Any funding necessary to support the position created in subsection (a)  
16 of this section shall be derived from the Secretary of State’s Service Fund.

17 \* \* \* Effective Date\* \* \*

18 Sec. 21. EFFECTIVE DATE

19 This act shall take effect on passage.