

1 S.15

2 Senator Parent moves that the report of the Committee on Government
3 Operations be amended as follows:

4 First: In Sec. 3, 17 V.S.A. § 2680 (Australian ballot system; general), by
5 striking out subsection (g) in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof the
6 following:

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

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

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

19 (3) Any municipality that has voted to apply the Australian ballot
20 system but did not vote to mail its annual or special meeting ballot to all active

1 registered voters shall mail an absentee ballot request form to all active
2 registered voters.

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

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

7 Second: By adding a new section to be Sec. 21a to read as follows:

8 Sec. 21a. VOTING ACCESS; STUDY COMMITTEE; REPORT

9 (a) Creation. There is created the Voting Access Study Committee to
10 evaluate how to expand Vermonters' access to statewide and local elections.

11 (b) Membership. The Committee shall be composed of the following
12 members:

13 (1) two current members of the House of Representatives, not from the
14 same political party, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;

15 (2) two current members of the Senate, not from the same political
16 party, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees;

17 (3) four representatives of municipalities, including a representative of
18 the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and the Town Clerks Association;

19 (4) four representatives representing the interests of voters, including a
20 representative from the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, the

1 Executive Director of Racial Equity or designee, the National Vote at Home
2 Institute or designee, and a registered Vermont voter; and

3 (5) the Director of the Secretary of State’s Elections Division or
4 designee.

5 (c) Powers and duties. The Committee shall study the ways Vermont can
6 increase its residents’ access to statewide and local elections, including
7 examination of the following issues:

8 (1) whether Town Meeting Day should be moved to a weekend or made
9 a State holiday;

10 (2) whether universal vote by mail should be required for municipalities
11 that vote to apply an Australian ballot system;

12 (3) whether universal vote by mail should be required for Vermont’s
13 general and primary elections; and

14 (4) whether universal vote by mail for statewide or local elections
15 increases access to voting among Vermonters who are Black, Indigenous, or
16 people of color or among populations or communities with historically low
17 voter turnout.

18 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical,
19 and legal assistance of the Secretary of State’s office and the Office of
20 Legislative Counsel.

1 (e) Report. On or before July 1, 2022, the Committee shall submit a
2 written report to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations
3 with its findings and any recommendations for legislative action.

4 (f) Meetings.

5 (1) The Director of the Secretary of State’s Elections Division shall call
6 the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before August 15, 2021.

7 (2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the
8 first meeting.

9 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

10 (4) The Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2022.

11 (g) Compensation and reimbursement.

12 (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
13 Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee serving in his or her
14 capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and
15 reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for not more than eight
16 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
17 General Assembly.

18 (2) Members of the Committee representing municipalities shall be
19 entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses as permitted
20 under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than eight meetings. These payments
21 shall be made from monies appropriated to the Secretary of State’s office.