

1 S.297

2 Introduced by Senators Ram Hinsdale, Chittenden, Clarkson, Harrison, Lyons,

3 Plunkett and White

4 Referred to Committee on

5 Date:

6 Subject: Elections; local elections; local elections using the Australian ballot

7 system; electronic ballot return

8 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to authorize

9 municipalities to adopt a system for electronic ballot return for local elections

10 using the Australian ballot system.

11                   An act relating to electronic ballot return in local elections

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

13                   Sec. 1. 17 V.S.A. § 2680a is added to read:

14                   § 2680a. ELECTRONIC BALLOT RETURN

15                   (a) As used in this section:

16                   (1) “Electronic ballot return” means a system that allows a voter to use

17                   electronic means to return a marked local election ballot to the clerk of the

18                   municipality in which the voter is registered.

19                   (2) “Qualified electronic transmission system” means an electronic

20                   transmission system that allows a voter to receive, mark, and return a ballot.

1        (b) At an annual or special meeting called for the purpose of authorizing  
2        electronic ballot return, a town, city, or incorporated village may vote to adopt  
3        a system of electronic ballot return for its local elections held by Australian  
4        ballot. A town, city, or incorporated village shall not use electronic ballot  
5        return at the same election at which its voters decide that the system shall be  
6        used.

7        (c) A town, city, or incorporated village that has adopted a system of  
8        electronic ballot return may send to voters, and receive from voters, ballots  
9        only by means of a qualified electronic transmission system.

10        (d) A qualified electronic transmission system shall offer and maintain  
11        reasonable data security and voter integrity protections, including:

12        (1) security auditability;  
13        (2) end-to-end encryption;  
14        (3) end-to-end verifiability;  
15        (4) dual-factor authentication; and  
16        (5) biometric or equivalent digital identity verification technologies.

17        (e) The clerk of a town, city, or incorporated village that has authorized  
18        electronic ballot return shall ensure that each ballot received through a  
19        qualified electronic transmission system is transcribed to an anonymous paper  
20        ballot. The clerk shall secure, count, maintain, and store a transcribed ballot in  
21        the same manner as any other ballot pursuant to chapter 51 of this title.

1        (f) All information or data generated by a voter using a qualified electronic  
2        transmission system shall be confidential and shall not be used for any purpose  
3        other than aggregate voter participation statistics.

4        (g) The Secretary of State shall publish guidance documents concerning the  
5        qualified electronic transmission systems available to municipalities, including  
6        recommendations for minimum security standards, voter privacy standards,  
7        auditability, and verification technology.

8        Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

9        This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.