

1 S.298

2 An act relating to voter protections

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

4 * * * Voter Protections Act * * *

5 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

6 This act may be cited as the “Voter Protections Act of 2026.”

7 Sec. 2. 17 V.S.A. chapter 35 is amended to read:

8 CHAPTER 35. OFFENSES AGAINST THE PURITY OF ELECTIONS

9 * * *

10 Subchapter 2. Penalties Upon Voters

11 * * *

12 § 1972. SHOWING BALLOT; ~~INTERFERENCE WITH VOTER~~

13 (a) A voter who, except in cases of assistance as provided in this title,
14 allows ~~his or her~~ the voter’s ballot to be seen by another person with an
15 apparent intention of letting it be known how ~~he or she~~ the voter is about to
16 vote or makes a false statement to the presiding officer at an election as to ~~his~~
17 ~~or her~~ the voter’s inability to mark ~~his or her~~ the voter’s ballot or places a
18 distinguishing mark on ~~his or her~~ the voter’s ballot ~~or a person who interferes~~
19 ~~with a voter when inside the guard rail or who, within the building in which the~~
20 ~~voting is proceeding, endeavors to induce a voter to vote for a particular~~
21 ~~candidate,~~ shall be fined \$1,000.00.

1 (d) As used in this section:

2 (1) “Municipality” means a town, city, village, school district, or other
3 political subdivision that holds public elections.

4 (2) “Protected class” means a group of citizens protected from
5 discrimination based on race or color, membership in a language minority
6 group, or having a disability as defined in 9 V.S.A. § 4501.

7 § 2046. CIVIL ACTIONS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL

8 (a) Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a
9 violation of this subchapter has occurred and that the rights of any voter or
10 group of voters have been affected by such violation, the Attorney General
11 may initiate a civil action in the Civil Division of the Superior Court in the
12 county in which the alleged violation has occurred for appropriate relief.

13 (b) In such civil action, the court may:

14 (1) award such preventive relief, including a permanent or temporary
15 injunction, restraining order, or other order against the person responsible for a
16 violation of this title, as is necessary to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights
17 granted by this title;

18 (2) assess a civil penalty against the respondent of not more than
19 \$5,000.00 for a first violation and of not more than \$25,000.00 for any
20 subsequent violation; and

1 Sec. 5. SUSPENSION OF DISCLOSURE PENALTIES FOR
2 CANDIDATES FOR STATE, LEGISLATIVE, AND COUNTY
3 OFFICE

4 Notwithstanding 17 V.S.A. § 2415, through May 30, 2027, the State Ethics
5 Commission shall not enforce against any delinquent filers, nor shall the Office
6 of the Secretary of State notify the State Ethics Commission of the names of
7 delinquent filers, nor shall the candidates for State office, county office, State
8 Senator, and State Representative be otherwise penalized for delinquently
9 filing a disclosure.

10 * * * Safety Protections for Candidates * * *

11 Sec. 6. 17 V.S.A. § 2901 is amended to read:

12 § 2901. DEFINITIONS

13 As used in this chapter:

14 * * *

15 (7) “Expenditure” means a payment, disbursement, distribution,
16 advance, deposit, loan, or gift of money or anything of value, paid or promised
17 to be paid, for the purpose of influencing an election, advocating a position on
18 a public question, or supporting or opposing one or more candidates.

19 (A) Expenditures may include those expenses that are necessary to
20 allow a candidate to campaign, such as expenses for the care of a dependent
21 family member that are incurred as a direct result of campaign activity or for

1 the provision of monitoring systems, protective detail, and cybersecurity
2 related to a candidate's security.

3 * * *

4 * * * Effective Date * * *

5 Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATE

6 This act shall take effect on passage.