

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs to which  
3 was referred Senate Bill No. 298 entitled “An act relating to creating the  
4 Vermont Voting Rights Act” respectfully reports that it has considered the  
5 same and recommends that the House propose to the Senate that the bill be  
6 amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu  
7 thereof the following:

8 \* \* \* Voter Protections Act \* \* \*

9 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

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

11 Sec. 2. 17 V.S.A. chapter 59 is added to read:

12 CHAPTER 59. VOTER PROTECTIONS

13 § 2801. DEFINITIONS

14 As used in this chapter:

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

17 (2) “Protected class” means a group of citizens protected from  
18 discrimination based on race or color or membership in a language minority  
19 group.

Commented [TD1]: Sec. 2. from [“as passed by Senate”](#) version.

1     § 2802. VOTE DENIAL OR DILUTION

2           (a) No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard, practice, or  
3     procedure shall be imposed or applied by the State or any municipality in a  
4     manner that results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the  
5     United States to vote based on race or color or membership in a language  
6     minority group.

7           (b) A violation of subsection (a) of this section is established if, on the  
8     basis of the totality of circumstances, it is shown that the political processes  
9     leading to nomination or election in the State or a municipality are not equally  
10    open to participation by members of a protected class in that its members have  
11    less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the  
12    political processes or to elect representatives of their choice. The extent to  
13    which members of a protected class have been elected to office in the State or  
14    municipality is one circumstance that may be considered.

15          (c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to establish a right to have  
16    members of a protected class elected in numbers equal to their proportion in  
17    the population.

18    § 2803. IMPAIRMENT OF VOTING RIGHTS OF REGISTERED VOTERS

19          Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to deny, impair, or otherwise  
20    adversely affect the right to vote of any registered voter.

1     § 2804. CIVIL ACTIONS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL

2           (a) Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a  
3     violation of this chapter has occurred and that the rights of any voter or group  
4     of voters have been affected by such violation, the Attorney General may  
5     initiate a civil action in the Civil Division of the Superior Court in the county  
6     in which the alleged violation has occurred for appropriate relief.

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

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

12          (2) assess a civil penalty against the respondent of not more than  
13    \$5,000.00 for a first violation and of not more than \$25,000.00 for any  
14    subsequent violation; and

15          (3) issue an order requiring reimbursement to the State of Vermont for  
16    the reasonable value of its services and its expenses in investigating and  
17    prosecuting the action.

18    Sec. 3. 17 V.S.A. chapter 35 is amended to read:

19            **CHAPTER 35. OFFENSES AGAINST THE PURITY OF ELECTIONS**

20                    \* \* \*

21                    **Subchapter 2. Penalties Upon Voters**

**Commented [TD2]:** Sec. 3 from [H.541](#) (an act relating to interference with voters and election officials).



1 (B) causing the other person to vote for, or not to vote for, any  
2 candidate for public office or public question at any election; or

3 (2) a public servant, an election official, or a public employee for the  
4 purpose of obstructing the administration of an election.

5 (b) A person who violates subsection (a) of this section shall be imprisoned  
6 not more than two years or fined not more than \$2,000.00, or both.

7 \* \* \*

8 \* \* \* Disclosures for Candidates for State, Legislative, and

9 County Office \* \* \*

10 Sec. 4. 17 V.S.A. § 2414 is amended to read:

11 § 2414. CANDIDATES FOR STATE AND, LEGISLATIVE, AND

12 COUNTY OFFICE; DISCLOSURE FORM

13 \* \* \*

14 (f) The State Ethics Commission shall provide informational resources to  
15 candidates and answer candidates' questions regarding the requirements of this  
16 section, how to accurately complete and submit the disclosure form, and the  
17 consequences pursuant to section 2415 of this title for failing to properly file  
18 the disclosure form.

19 Sec. 5. SUSPENSION OF DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENT AND

20 PENALTIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR STATE, LEGISLATIVE,

21 AND COUNTY OFFICE

**Commented [TD3]:** Secs. 4 and 5 are new to this bill.

**Commented [TD4]:** Last amended by [2024, No. 171](#) (an act relating to the State Ethics Commission and the State Code of Ethics).

1 Notwithstanding 17 V.S.A. §§ 2414 and 2415, for the period from June 1,  
2 2026, to May 30, 2027:

3 (1) candidates for State office, county office, State Senator, and State  
4 Representative shall not be required to file the disclosure form or related  
5 documents described in 17 V.S.A. § 2414 nor shall these candidates be  
6 penalized pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2415; and

7 (2) the Office of the Secretary of State and State Ethics Commission  
8 shall not enforce the provisions of 17 V.S.A. § 2415.

9 \* \* \* Safety Protections for Candidates \* \* \*

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

11 § 2901. DEFINITIONS

12 As used in this chapter:

13 \* \* \*

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

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

**Commented [TD5]:** Sec. 6. from [“as passed by Senate” version.](#)

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.

7 and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act relating  
8 to voter protections”

**Commented [TD6]:** This language will formally rename the bill.

9  
10  
11 (Committee vote: \_\_\_\_\_)

12 \_\_\_\_\_

13 Representative \_\_\_\_\_

14 FOR THE COMMITTEE