

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, or having a disability as defined in 9 V.S.A. § 4501.

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, or having a disability.

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

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§ 1972. SHOWING BALLOT; INTERFERENCE WITH VOTER

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

(b) ~~It shall be the duty of the election officers to see that the offender is duly prosecuted for a violation of this section.~~

\* \* \*

§ 1975. INTERFERENCE WITH VOTERS AND ELECTION OFFICIALS

(a) No person shall intentionally or recklessly intimidate, threaten, or coerce, or attempt to intimidate, threaten, or coerce:

(1) any other person for the purpose of:

(A) obstructing the right of the other person to vote or to vote as the other person may choose; or





1 of the Secretary of State shall notify the State Ethics Commission of the names  
2 of delinquent filers, nor shall the candidates for State office, county office,  
3 State Senator, and State Representative be otherwise penalized for delinquently  
4 filing a disclosure.

5 \* \* \* Safety Protections for Candidates \* \* \*

6 Sec. 7. 17 V.S.A. § 2901 is amended to read:

7 § 2901. DEFINITIONS

8 As used in this chapter:

9 \* \* \*

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

14 (A) Expenditures may include those expenses that are necessary to  
15 allow a candidate to campaign, such as expenses for the care of a dependent  
16 family member that are incurred as a direct result of campaign activity or for  
17 the provision of monitoring systems, protective detail, and cybersecurity  
18 related to a candidate’s security.

19 \* \* \*

20 \* \* \* Effective Date \* \* \*

21 Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

1        This act shall take effect on passage.

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

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6        (Committee vote: \_\_\_\_\_)

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\_\_\_\_\_

8

Representative \_\_\_\_\_

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FOR THE COMMITTEE