

BILL OVERVIEW

To be retitled “an act relating to voter protections”

As amended by the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, Draft 5.1

(Changes from the “as passed by Senate” version are indicated in red.)

PART ONE. Voter Protections Act

Sec. 1 is a short title naming the bill upon passage the “**Voter Protections Act** of 2026.”

Sec. 2 amends [17 V.S.A. chapter 35](#), “offenses against the purity of elections,” a chapter that already includes civil and criminal sanctions for election violations made by election workers and by voters (e.g. voter fraud). This section adds two new categories of prohibited election conduct: 1) criminal prohibitions on interfering with voters and elections officials, and 2) civil prohibitions on vote denial and vote dilution.

- [17 V.S.A. § 1972](#) (to be retitled “Showing ballots”) is amended to remove certain language that will be made redundant by the new 17 V.S.A. § 1975.
- A new section, 17 V.S.A. § 1975 (“Interference with voters and election officials”) is added. This section will prohibit any person from intentionally or recklessly intimidate, threaten, or coerce (or attempting to do so) ‘any other person for the purpose of obstructing the right of the other person to vote or to vote as the other person may choose or causing the other person to vote for, or not to vote for, any candidate for public office or public question at any election.’ Similarly, it will prohibit any person from threatening a public servant, an election official, or a public employee for the purpose of obstructing the administration of an election. Violators shall be imprisoned not more than two years or fined not more than \$2,000.00, or both.
 - Note: The ‘as passed by Senate’ version had four distinct criminal offenses regarding voter intimidation and election interference that were substituted by the language in [H.541](#) (“An act relating to interference with voters and election officials”).
- A new section, 17 V.S.A. § 1976 (“Impairment of voting rights of registered voters”), is added stating that “nothing in this chapter [offenses against the purity of election] shall be construed to deny, impair, or otherwise adversely affect the right to vote of any registered voter.”
 - Note: Various sections from the ‘as passed by Senate’ version have been renumbered in the HGOMA amendment.
- A new subchapter 6 (“Voter protections”) is added with two new statutory sections:
 - A new 17 V.S.A. § 2045 (“Vote denial or dilution”) will prohibit vote denial and vote dilution, stating “[n]o voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard,

practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by the State or any municipality in a manner that results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote based on race or color, membership in a language minority group, **or having a disability as defined in 9 V.S.A. § 4501.**” A violation is “established if, on the basis of the totality of circumstances, it is shown that the political processes leading to nomination or election in the State or a municipality are not equally open to participation by members of a protected class in that its members have less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political processes or to elect representatives of their choice.” This section will also will define two terms, “municipality” and “protected class.”

- A new 17 V.S.A. § 2046 (“Civil actions by attorney general”) empowers the Attorney General’s Office with enforcing and violations through civil actions. ‘Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a violation has occurred and that the rights of any voter or group of voters have been affected by such violation, the Attorney General may initiate a civil action for appropriate relief. A court may provide remedy through (1) an injunction stopping the conduct; (2) a civil penalty against the violator of not more than \$5,000.00 for a first violation and of not more than \$25,000.00 for any subsequent violation; and (3) an order requiring reimbursement to the State for its expenses in investigating and prosecuting the action.
- **Note: The ‘as passed by Senate’ version had the substance of §§ 2045 and 2046 organized under a new chapter, compared to in the HGOMA amendment, where these sections are organized under 17 V.S.A. chapter 34 (“offenses against the purity of elections”) The effect of this is that the Attorney General’s Office will have enforcement and investigation powers to enforces these new provisions (including). These powers already exist under Subchapter 5 (“Enforcement and investigation”), recently enacted by [2026 Act 75 \(S.23\)](#), § 2.**

PART TWO. Voter Checklists

Sec. 3 will amend [17 V.S.A. § 2154](#) (“Statewide voter checklists”), subsection (c), to require that “any person wishing to obtain a copy of . . . a municipality’s portion of the statewide voter checklist, or any other municipal voter checklist shall swear or affirm, under penalty of perjury that the person will not A) use the checklist for commercial purposes; or B) knowingly disclose the checklist to any foreign government or to a federal agency or commission or to a person acting on behalf of a foreign government or of such a federal entity in circumvention of the prohibited purposes for using the checklist.” The existing law only explicitly required this for copies of *statewide* voter checklists.

PART THREE. Disclosures for Candidates for State, Legislative, and County Office

Sec. 4 will amend [17 V.S.A. § 2414](#) (“Candidates for State and legislative office; disclosure form”), adding a new subsection (f) that requires the State Ethics Commission to provide informational resources to candidates and answer candidates’ questions (by email and phone) regarding the requirements of the candidate disclosure form, how to accurately complete and submit the form, and the penalties for failing to properly file the disclosure. The Commission shall make available on its web page the disclosure form and preprepared responses to FAQs. The Secretary of State’s Office shall provide hyperlinks from its web page connecting to the disclosure form and other materials and resources required of the State Ethics Commission.

Sec. 5 will suspend, through May 30, 2027, enforcement and penalties for any candidates for state, legislative, and county office who delinquentlly files a financial disclosure form required by [17 V.S.A. § 2414](#).

PART FOUR. Safety Protections for Candidates

Sec. 6 amends 17 V.S.A. § 2901(7) in Vermont’s campaign finance law so that the definition of “expenditure” may include those incurred as for the **provision of monitoring systems, protective detail, and cybersecurity related to a candidate’s security**.

PART FIVE. Effective Date

Sec. 7 sets the act to take effect on passage.