

BILL OVERVIEW

“Senate Elections Miscellaneous Bill”

Purpose: This bill proposes to:

- automatically register a person to vote when the person applies for participation in Reach Ahead services and require State agencies to report to the General Assembly concerning opportunities to expand automatic voter registration through the application and registration forms used by those State agencies;
- allow any individual 16 years of age or older to preregister to vote for an election, provided that the individual will be 18 years of age or older on or before the day of the election;
- amend the threshold contribution and expenditure amounts that trigger campaign finance reporting under 17 V.S.A. § 2964 and establish penalties for delinquent filing of campaign finance reports and disclosures;
- establish the Democracy Certificate Program to replace the current option of public financing for campaigns;
- require employers to provide four hours of protected leave time to allow employees to vote on statewide election days.

PART ONE: Automatic Voter Registration (Secs. 1-3)

Sec. 1 amends [17 V.S.A. § 2144a \(registration\)](#) [under Chapter 43: Qualification and Registration of Voters; Subchapter 2: Registration of Voters] by adding a new subdivision (1)(B) to enable eligible people to register to vote simultaneously with their application for or renewal of any services available pursuant to [33 V.S.A. chapter 12](#).

Sec. 2 amends [23 V.S.A. § 1205 \(civil suspension; summary procedure\)](#) [under Chapter 12: Reach Ahead] by adding a new subsection (c) that will require the Commissioner of Human Services to include on applications an automatic voter registration for the applicant. Applicants may opt-out of this automatic voter registration.

- Note: The “Reach Ahead” program assists families with employment support and food assistance. See [33 V.S.A. § 1202 \(Purpose\)](#)

Sec. 3 is session law that requires various agencies and departments (Human Services, Education, Labor, Commerce and Community Development, Children and Families, and Health) to report to the Government Operations Committees by November 15, 2025 that lists and describes any of their forms that may be updated to include automatic voter registration, as well as how their application systems may be integrated into the State’s voter registration system.

PART TWO: Preregistration for Young Voters (Secs. 4)

Sec. 4 amends [17 V.S.A. § 2121 \(eligibility of voters\)](#) by adding a new subsection (c) that (c) will enable otherwise eligible voters to register to vote in Vermont if they are 16 years of age, but restricting them from actually voting in any election in the State unless the person is 18 years of age.

PART THREE: Campaign Finance (Secs. 5-11)

Sec. 5 amends [17 V.S.A. § 2903 \(penalties\)](#) so that general penalties and enforcement provisions will cover the subchapter 6 (Public Financing Option) (see Sec.8-10 below).

Sec. 6 amends [17 V.S.A. § 2964 \(campaign reports; candidates for state office, the general assembly, and county office; political committees; political parties\)](#), removing the minimum expending/accepting threshold for campaign reports. It also will require candidates, political committees, or political parties to file a report and affirmative statement that they have not made expenditures or accepted contributions.

Sec. 7 creates a new statutory section, 17 V.S.A. § 2974, that will impose a \$10 per day penalty for delinquent candidate filings.

- Note: Secs. 6-7 incorporate all of [S.86](#).

Sections 8-10 repeal the current public financing option and replace it with a “Democracy Certificate Program.” In brief, candidates for statewide office may opt into a ‘public financing option’ if they limit their outside fundraising. The Secretary of State issues four democracy certificates, each worth \$25.00 in candidate financing, to each voter who has opted into the program, and the funds are disbursed to the assigned candidates. The program is available for primary and general elections, but not special elections.

- Sec. 8 is a session law that repeals the current public financing option [17 V.S.A. chapter 61, subchapter 5 \(campaign finance; public financing option\)](#).
- Sec. 9 creates a new Subchapter 6 in 17 V.S.A. chapter 61 (Campaign Finance), also to be titled “Public Financing Option.”
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2987 (democracy certificate program) provides a general description of the program.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2988 (democracy certificate issuance) sets forth the number and value of each certificate a voter may obtain, as well as the Secretary’s issuance method and schedule.

- 17 V.S.A. § 2989 (democracy certificate assignment and receipt) provides for voters irrevocably assigning their certificate only to participating candidates and for voters submitting them to town clerks for verification.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2990 (candidate qualification) requires participating candidates to limit their acceptance of outside contributions to \$2,000.00 per source, but excluding the value of democracy certificates assigned to such candidate.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2991 (disbursement of public finance funds) sets parameter for the Secretary to disperse the assigned funds to candidates. Notably, this is conditions on fund availability.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2992 (campaign fund limitations) sets limits on the how much participating candidates may raise during an election cycle: \$1,000,000 for Governor and \$500,000 for Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, State Auditor, Attorney General, or Secretary of State.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2993 (accountability) requires the Secretary to publish program information so that the public may track assignments of democracy certificates and disbursements of public finance funds.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2994 (administration) charges the Secretary of State with operating the program. Annually, on January 1st, the Secretary of State shall set and publish the Democracy Certificate Program Fund Limit for that year for democracy certificate disbursements.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2995 (violations) prohibits a person from knowingly and intentionally purchasing, buying, selling, paying, or receiving consideration for any certificate or attempts to do so. A person may not improperly possess, conceal, or destroy certificates. They may not falsify information.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2996 (reporting) requires an annual report from the Secretary to the Government Operation Committees with recommendations for maximum campaign limits, contribution limitations, and prior and projected democracy certificate program funding needs.
 - 17 V.S.A. § 2997 (design of democracy certificate) lays out the required design of democracy certificates.
- Sec. 10 creates a new statutory section, 17 V.S.A. § 2998, to empower and require the Secretary to adopt rules for the administration and implementation of the democracy certificate program.

PART FOUR: Employer-Provided Time off for Statewide Election Days (Sec. 11)

- Sec. 11 creates a new statutory section, 17 V.S.A. § 2998, to empower and require the Secretary to adopt rules for the administration and implementation of the democracy certificate program. This will house one new statutory section, 21 V.S.A. § 571 (voters), which will require employers in this State to permit any employee, upon 24 hours advanced notice to the employee, to take up to four hours off from employment to vote in person in any election. Employers may specify the scheduled working hours during which the employee may take time off to vote. Employers may not discipline or otherwise deny any employee any benefit for voting in this way, nor may they require the employee to find cover. Employers are not required to compensate employees for this time. Employers must post notice of these provisions. An employer who violates these provisions shall be fined not more than \$200.00.

PART FIVE: Effective Date. (Sec. 12)

Sec. 12 sets all sections of the bill to take effect on July 2025.