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SENATE BILL NO. 1174

Offered January 8, 2025

Prefiled January 7, 2025

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 24.2-310, 24.2-604, 24.2-701.2, and 24.2-1003 of the Code of Virginia, relating to elections; prohibited activities; distribution of ballot measure materials.

Patron—Suetterlein

Referred to Committee on Privileges and Elections

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 24.2-310, 24.2-604, 24.2-701.2, and 24.2-1003 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 24.2-310. Requirements for polling places.

A. The polling place for each precinct shall be located within the county or city and either within the precinct or within one mile of the precinct boundary, unless a waiver has been granted pursuant to subsection G. The polling place for a county precinct may be located within a city (i) if the city is wholly contained within the county election district served by the precinct or (ii) if the city is wholly contained within the county and the polling place is located on property owned by the county. The polling place for a town precinct may be located within one mile of the precinct and town boundary. For town elections held in November, the town shall use the polling places established by the county for its elections.

B. The governing body of each county, city, and town shall provide funds to enable the general registrar to provide adequate facilities at each polling place for the conduct of elections. Each polling place shall be located in a public building whenever practicable. If more than one polling place is located in the same building, each polling place shall be located in a separate room or separate and defined space.

C. Polling places shall be accessible to qualified voters as required by the provisions of the Virginians with Disabilities Act (§ 51.5-1 et seq.), the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (52 U.S.C. § 20101 et seq.), and the Americans with Disabilities Act relating to public services (42 U.S.C. § 12131 et seq.). The State Board shall provide instructions to the local electoral boards and general registrars to assist the localities in complying with the requirements of the Acts.

D. If an emergency makes a polling place unusable or inaccessible, the electoral board or the general registrar shall provide an alternative polling place and give notice of the change in polling place, including to all candidates, or such candidate's campaign, appearing on the ballot to be voted at the alternative polling place, subject to the prior approval of the State Board. The general registrar shall provide notice to the voters appropriate to the circumstances of the emergency. For the purposes of this subsection, an "emergency" means a rare and unforeseen combination of circumstances, or the resulting state, that calls for immediate action.

E. It shall be permissible to distribute campaign and referendum materials on the election day on the property on which a polling place is located and outside of the building containing the room where the election is conducted except as specifically prohibited by law including, without limitation, the prohibitions of § 24.2-604 and the establishment of the "Prohibited Area" within 40 feet of any entrance to the polling place. However, and notwithstanding the provisions of clause (i) of subsection A of § 24.2-604, and upon the approval of the local electoral board, campaign and referendum materials may be distributed outside the polling place and inside the structure where the election is conducted, provided that the "Prohibited Area" (i) includes the area within the structure that is beyond 40 feet of any entrance to the polling place and the area within the structure that is within 40 feet of any entrance to the room where the election is conducted and (ii) is maintained and enforced as provided in § 24.2-604. The local electoral board may approve campaigning activities inside the building where the election is conducted when an entrance to the building is from an adjoining building, or if establishing the 40-foot prohibited area outside the polling place would hinder or delay a qualified voter from entering or leaving the building.

F. Any local government, local electoral board, or the State Board may make monetary grants to any non-governmental entity furnishing facilities under the provisions of § 24.2-307 or 24.2-308 for use as a polling place. Such grants shall be made for the sole purpose of meeting the accessibility requirements of this section. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to obligate any local government, local electoral board, or the State Board to appropriate funds to any non-governmental entity.

G. The general registrar or the governing body of the locality may request from the Department of Elections a waiver to establish a polling place that does not meet the location requirements of subsection A in the event that there is no suitable building that could be used within the precinct or within one mile of the precinct boundary. The Department shall grant such a waiver and may impose any conditions on the waiver

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59 that it deems necessary or appropriate to ensure accessibility and security of the polling place and compliance
60 with any other requirements of state or federal law.

61 **§ 24.2-604. Polling places; prohibited activities; prohibited area; penalties.**

62 A. During the times the polls are open and ballots are being counted, or within one hour of opening or
63 after closing, it is unlawful for any person (i) to loiter or congregate within 40 feet of any entrance of any
64 polling place; (ii) within such distance to give, tender, or exhibit any ballot, ticket, or other campaign *or*
65 *referendum* material to any person or to solicit or in any manner attempt to influence any person in casting his
66 vote; (iii) to hinder or delay a qualified voter in entering or leaving a polling place; or (iv) to knowingly
67 possess any firearm as defined in § 18.2-308.2:2 within 40 feet of any building, or part thereof, used as a
68 polling place.

69 B. Prior to opening the polls, the officers of election shall post, in the area within 40 feet of any entrance
70 to the polling place, sufficient notices that state "Prohibited Area" in two-inch type. The notices shall also
71 state the provisions of this section in not less than 24-point type. The officers of election shall post the notices
72 within the prohibited area to be visible to voters and the public.

73 C. It is unlawful for any authorized representative permitted in the polling place pursuant to § 24.2-604.4,
74 any voter, or any other person in the room to (i) hinder or delay a qualified voter; (ii) give, tender, or exhibit
75 any ballot, ticket, or other campaign *or referendum* material to any person; (iii) solicit or in any manner
76 attempt to influence any person in casting his vote; (iv) hinder or delay any officer of election; (v) be in a
77 position to see the marked ballot of any other voter; or (vi) otherwise impede the orderly conduct of the
78 election.

79 D. The provisions of subsections A and C shall not be construed to prohibit a person who approaches or
80 enters the polling place for the purpose of voting from wearing a shirt, hat, or other apparel on which a
81 candidate's name or a political slogan appears or from having a sticker or button attached to his apparel on
82 which a candidate's name or a political slogan appears. This exemption shall not apply to candidates,
83 representatives of candidates, or any other person who approaches or enters the polling place for any purpose
84 other than voting.

85 E. This section shall not be construed to prohibit a candidate from entering any polling place on the day of
86 the election to vote, or to visit a polling place for no longer than 10 minutes per polling place per election
87 day, provided that he complies with the restrictions stated in subsections A, C, and D.

88 F. The provisions of clause (iv) of subsection A shall not apply to (i) any law-enforcement officer or any
89 retired law-enforcement officer qualified pursuant to subsection C of § 18.2-308.016; (ii) any person
90 occupying his own private property that falls within 40 feet of a polling place; or (iii) an armed security
91 officer, licensed pursuant to Article 4 (§ 9.1-138 et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1, whose employment or
92 performance of his duties occurs within 40 feet of any building, or part thereof, used as a polling place.

93 G. The officers of election may require any person who is found by a majority of the officers present to be
94 in violation of this section to remain outside of the prohibited area. Any person violating subsection A or C is
95 guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

96 **§ 24.2-701.2. Absentee voting in person; voter satellite offices.**

97 A. The governing body of any county or city may establish, by ordinance, voter satellite offices to be used
98 in the locality for absentee voting in person. The governing body may establish as many offices as it deems
99 necessary. No change in, including the creation or abolishment of, any voter satellite office shall be enacted
100 within 60 days next preceding any general election. Notice shall be published prior to enactment in a
101 newspaper having general circulation in the locality once a week for two successive weeks.

102 B. Any voter satellite office shall be in a public building owned or leased by the county, city, or town
103 within the county and may be in a facility that is owned or leased by the Commonwealth and used as a
104 location for Department of Motor Vehicles facilities or as an office of the general registrar. Such location
105 shall be deemed the equivalent of the office of the general registrar for the purposes of completing the
106 application for an absentee ballot in person pursuant to §§ 24.2-701 and 24.2-706. Any such location shall
107 have adequate facilities for the protection of all elections materials produced in the process of absentee voting
108 in person, the voted and unvoted absentee ballots, and any voting systems in use at the location.

109 C. Voter satellite offices shall be accessible to qualified voters as required by the provisions of the
110 Virginians with Disabilities Act (§ 51.5-1 et seq.), the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped
111 Act (52 U.S.C. § 20101 et seq.), and the Americans with Disabilities Act relating to public services (42
112 U.S.C. § 12131 et seq.). The State Board shall provide instructions to the local electoral boards and general
113 registrars to assist the localities in complying with the requirements of the acts.

114 D. The governing body of each county, city, and town shall provide funds to enable the general registrar
115 to provide adequate facilities at each voter satellite office for the conduct of elections.

116 E. Not later than 55 days prior to any election, the general registrar shall post notice of all voter satellite
117 office locations in the locality and the dates and hours of operation of each location in the office of the
118 general registrar and on the official website for the county or city. Such notice shall remain in the office of
119 the general registrar and on the official website for the county or city for the duration of the period during

120 which absentee voting in person is available. If the county or city does not have an official website, such
121 notice shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county or city at least once prior to the
122 election but not later than 55 days prior to such election.

123 F. If an emergency makes a voter satellite office unusable or inaccessible, the electoral board or the
124 general registrar shall provide an alternative voter satellite office, subject to the approval of the State Board,
125 and shall give notice of the change in the location of the voter satellite office. The general registrar shall
126 provide notice to the voters appropriate to the circumstances of the emergency. For the purposes of this
127 subsection, "emergency" means a rare and unforeseen combination of circumstances, or the resulting state,
128 that calls for immediate action.

129 G. The provisions of subsection E of § 24.2-310 providing certain limited circumstances in which a local
130 electoral board may approve an exception to the prohibition on the distribution of campaign *or ballot*
131 *measure* materials inside the prohibited area outside of a polling place shall apply to voter satellite offices and
132 the building in which such offices may be located.

133 H. A voter satellite office established pursuant to this section shall be deemed to be the equivalent of an
134 office of the general registrar for purposes of completing an application for an absentee ballot in person
135 pursuant to §§ 24.2-701, 24.2-701.1, and 24.2-706.

136 **§ 24.2-1003. Campaigning at registration locations.**

137 Any person who gives or tenders any campaign *or referendum* materials to, or solicits or attempts to
138 influence the vote of, any person while he is at any registration location as defined in Article 3 (§ 24.2-411 et
139 seq.) of Chapter 4 of this title knowing that such person is there for the purpose of registration, shall be guilty
140 of a Class 3 misdemeanor. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the distribution of campaign *or referendum*
141 materials outside any building in which a registration activity is being conducted.