

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 253

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study the consolidation and scheduling of general elections in Virginia. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 20, 2025
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2025

WHEREAS, periodic popular elections give the electorate its voice in government and these electoral decisions are the foundation of representative democracy; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is one of just four states in the United States of America with elections held in the "off cycle" meaning odd-numbered years when neither a presidential or congressional election takes place; and

WHEREAS, a general election is held each November in the Commonwealth for either federal offices, statewide offices, General Assembly offices, constitutional offices, or local offices; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's off-year state elections may have been a historical accident due to the ratification of the Constitution of Virginia in 1851; such elections contributed to the Commonwealth having some of the lowest voter turnouts in America during the 20th Century; and

WHEREAS, this cycle of elections, campaigning, and politics is practically continuous in the Commonwealth of Virginia, likely leading to increased voter apathy and reduced voter turnout; and

WHEREAS, the costs of administering annual elections are significant and are borne largely by local governments; and

WHEREAS, consolidating Virginia's state and local elections and holding such elections in even-numbered years would likely realize significant savings of tax dollars, while also encouraging voter interest and participation; and

WHEREAS, according to the Virginia Public Access Project, the amount of money spent campaigning for state offices has dramatically increased over the past decade and a half with the total spending in gubernatorial elections increasing from \$40,975,989 (2009) to \$56,861,988 (2013) to \$66,166,935 (2017) to \$137,551,127 (2021); the total spending in state senate elections increasing from \$37,544,148 (2011) to \$42,576,066 (2015) to \$56,183,148 (2019) to \$112,239,884 (2023); and the total spending in House of Delegates elections increasing from \$26,133,578 (2011) to \$36,023,755 (2013) to \$30,737,173 (2015) to \$46,560,922 (2017) to \$68,077,424 (2019) to \$81,436,494 (2021) to \$94,866,001 (2023); and

WHEREAS, transitioning to the federal election cycle would likely reduce the need to raise campaign contributions due to the efficiencies gained by overlapping political operations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study the consolidation and scheduling of general elections in Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall consist of 13 members that include eight legislative members, four nonlegislative citizen members, and one ex officio member. Members shall be appointed as follows: three members of the Senate, at least two of whom shall be members of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; five members of the House of Delegates, at least three of whom shall be members of the House Committee on Privileges and Elections, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; two nonlegislative citizen members, one of whom shall be a current or former member of a board of supervisors and one of whom shall be a current or former member of a local electoral board, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; and two nonlegislative citizen members, one of whom shall be a current or former member of a town or city council and one of whom shall be a current or former general registrar, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates. The Commissioner of Elections or his designee shall serve ex officio with nonvoting privileges. Nonlegislative citizen members shall be citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Unless otherwise approved in writing by the chairman of the joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk, nonlegislative citizen members shall be reimbursed only for travel originating and ending within the Commonwealth of Virginia for the purpose of attending meetings. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required. The joint subcommittee shall elect a chairman and vice-chairman from among its membership, who shall be members of the General Assembly.

In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall weigh potential and probable effects of moving some or all of Virginia's state or local elections to even-numbered years in order to coincide with the federal election cycle, including impacts on voter turnout, effects on campaign costs and fundraising, the interplay between state and federal elections and campaign finance laws and regulations, and estimated cost savings for local governments and, in turn, the taxpayers. Any recommendations by the joint subcommittee to

consolidate or reschedule Virginia's general elections shall include specific recommendations as to (i) which elected offices' terms should be extended or shortened in order to achieve the recommended shift in the election schedule, (ii) any amendments to the Constitution of Virginia and the Code of Virginia that are necessary to achieve and implement the joint subcommittee's recommended consolidation or schedule, (iii) whether Virginia's current two-year budget cycle should be adjusted, and (iv) any budget amendments that are necessary to accomplish the consolidation and rescheduling.

Administrative staff support shall be provided by the Office of the Clerk of the Senate or the Office of the Clerk of the House of Delegates as may be appropriate for the house in which the chairman of the joint subcommittee serves. Legal, research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the joint subcommittee shall be provided by the Division of Legislative Services. Technical assistance shall be provided by Department of Elections. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee for this study, upon request.

The joint subcommittee shall be limited to four meetings for the 2025 interim and four meetings for the 2026 interim, and the direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$19,840 for each year without approval as set out in this resolution. Approval for unbudgeted nonmember-related expenses shall require the written authorization of the chairman of the joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required.

No recommendation of the joint subcommittee shall be adopted if a majority of the Senate members or a majority of the House members appointed to the joint subcommittee (i) vote against the recommendation and (ii) vote for the recommendation to fail notwithstanding the majority vote of the joint subcommittee.

The joint subcommittee shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2025, and for the second year by November 30, 2026, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall state whether the joint subcommittee intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may approve or disapprove expenditures for this study, extend or delay the period for the conduct of the study, or authorize additional meetings during the 2025 or 2026 interims.