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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2015

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A N A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

Introduced By: Senators Cote, Ottiano, Picard, and Kettle

Date Introduced: January 13, 2015

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 17 of the General Laws entitled "ELECTIONS" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 5.1

4 INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

5 **17-5.1-1. Presentation of petition.** -- (a) Any natural person or persons who propose to  
6 begin an initiative and referendum process shall obtain an application petition form and summary  
7 of the initiative and referendum process from the secretary of state. The person or persons who  
8 file for said application petition shall be deemed the proponent of the initiative measure.

9 (b) To begin the initiative and referendum process, at least fifty (50) qualified voters must  
10 sign the application petition obtained from the secretary of state containing the initiative measure  
11 in its entirety, and the proponent shall submit same to the secretary of state for certification.

12 (c) An initiative measure embracing more than one subject may not be submitted to the  
13 electors or have any effect. Separate initiatives must be filed for different subjects. A measure  
14 shall be deemed to embrace more than one subject if its parts are not both reasonably germane to  
15 each other and functionally related.

16 **17-5.1-2. Certification of application petition.** -- (a) Within ten (10) days of receipt of  
17 the application petition, the secretary of state shall certify: (1) Whether or not a sufficient number  
18 of qualified voters have signed the application petition; (2) Whether the application petition  
19 complies with the requirements of Art. VI, § 2(b) of the state's constitution; and (3) Whether the

1 application petition complies with § 17-5.1-1.

2 (b) Upon certification, the secretary of state shall, within fifteen (15) business days of  
3 receiving the proposed initiative, prepare a draft ballot text for the initiative in conformity with §  
4 17-5.1-3 and a concise and impartial statement summarizing the measure and its major effect.

5 **17-5.1-3. Ballot text and summary. -- (a) The ballot text of any statutory initiative shall**  
6 consist of: (1) A caption which reasonably identifies the subject of the measure; and (2) A  
7 question which plainly phrases the chief purpose of the measure so that an affirmative response  
8 corresponds to an affirmative vote on the measure. Such ballot text shall be as brief and concise  
9 as possible totaling no more than one hundred and twenty-five (125) words.

10 (b) The ballot text of an initiative to amend the state's constitution shall consist of: (1) A  
11 caption which reasonably identifies the subject of the measure; and (2) The text of the proposed  
12 constitutional language in its entirety.

13 (c) Immediately upon the preparation of the ballot text and summary of an initiative  
14 petition, the secretary of state shall transmit forthwith copies of the text of the measure and  
15 summary to the proponent. If the proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be more than  
16 one proponent approves the ballot text and summary, the secretary of state shall immediately  
17 transmit the same to the clerk of the house of representatives and of the senate. The appropriate  
18 committee in the house of representatives and in the senate may hold public hearings on the  
19 subject of the measure; provided, that nothing in this section shall be construed as authority for  
20 the general assembly to alter the measure or prevent it from appearing on the ballot.

21 (d) If the proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be more than one proponent  
22 objects to the ballot text and/or summary prepared by the secretary of state, the proponent shall so  
23 notify the secretary of state within five (5) business days of receipt. The secretary of state shall  
24 thereupon attempt to accommodate the concerns of the proponent or a majority of the proponents  
25 if there be more than one proponent, and the proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be  
26 more than one proponent shall determine whether the ballot text and summary shall be  
27 transmitted to the general assembly.

28 (e) The secretary of state shall, within ten (10) business days of the proponent's receipt  
29 and approval of the draft ballot text and summary statement, assign a petition reference number  
30 and shall prepare and make available to the proponent the circulation petition for voter signatures  
31 pursuant to § 17-5.1-4. The secretary of state shall place at the top of each petition in addition to  
32 the ballot text the following notice in bold type: "The purpose and intent of this initiative shall be  
33 maintained. However, this proponent may later amend the initiative measure set forth in this  
34 petition before it appears on the ballot if the amendments are consistent with this initiative's

1 purpose and intent." Petitioners may, at their own expense, have petition papers duplicated.

2 **17-5.1-4. Petition papers and signatures.** -- (a) The name and address of each signatory  
3 must be printed legibly preceding the signature on each line of the circulation petition. Any  
4 individual who signs a circulation petition with any name other than his/her own shall be guilty of  
5 a felony and may be punished by imprisonment for a term up to two (2) years and/or may be  
6 fined up to two thousand dollars (\$2,000). Any individual who knowingly signs a circulation  
7 petition more than once shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and may be punished by imprisonment  
8 for a term of up to one year, and/or may be fined not more than five hundred dollars (\$500).

9 (b) Each circulation petition shall be limited to signatures from one municipality.

10 (c) Circulation petitions shall be circulated only by persons who are at least eighteen (18)  
11 years of age at the time the petition is circulated. All circulators who are not to be paid for  
12 circulating petitions concerning ballot issues shall display an identification badge issued by the  
13 petitioners, meeting design standards set by the secretary of state that includes the words  
14 "VOLUNTEER CIRCULATOR" in bold-faced type which shall be clearly legible. All circulators  
15 who are to be paid for circulating petitions concerning ballot issues shall display an identification  
16 badge issued by the petitioners, meeting design standards set by the secretary of state that  
17 includes the words "PAID CIRCULATOR" in bold-faced type which shall be clearly legible, and  
18 the name and telephone number of the individual and/or firm employing or making payments to  
19 the circulator. Provided, however, that any compensation to a paid circulator based on a per  
20 signature basis shall be prohibited. Each circulator shall carry and offer for review by each  
21 prospective initiative petition signer the complete text of the initiative and a copy of all such  
22 campaign finance reports relating to the initiative as may be required by law. Any individual who  
23 violates these stipulations shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and may be punished as provided for  
24 in subsection (a) herein.

25 **17-5.1-5. Campaign finance laws applicable.** -- (a) Rhode Island campaign finance laws  
26 pertaining to contributions, expenditures and reporting requirements shall apply to any campaign  
27 in support of or in opposition to any initiative. In addition to any other reporting requirements  
28 required by law, reports of contributions and expenditures shall be required of the proponents of  
29 any initiative, commencing with the first Monday after the original circulation petition papers  
30 have been provided to the proponents, and at fourteen (14) day intervals thereafter, until  
31 certification by the secretary of state that the requisite number of signatures have been obtained to  
32 place the measure on the general election ballot.

33 (b) Exclusive of payment made to or received by paid circulators, any individual or group  
34 who gives or receives payment or anything of value for a signature shall be guilty of a

1 misdemeanor.

2 **17-5.1-6. Certification of circulation petition.** -- Within four hundred twenty-five (425)  
3 days from the date the secretary of state has assigned a petition reference number and issued the  
4 first initiative petition forms, the secretary of state shall certify whether or not a sufficient number  
5 of qualified voters have signed the circulation petition and, if so, that the initiative has qualified  
6 for the ballot.

7 **17-5.1-7. Presentation to general assembly.** -- (a) Any circulation petition certified on  
8 or before March 1 in any calendar year shall be delivered immediately by the secretary of state to  
9 the clerk of the house of representatives and of the senate.

10 (b) Any circulation petition certified after March 1 in any calendar year shall be retained  
11 by the secretary of state until the second legislative day of the next following January session of  
12 the general assembly, at which time the said petition shall be delivered by the secretary of state to  
13 the clerk of the house of representatives and of the senate.

14 (c) Immediately upon receipt of an initiative petition, the presiding officer in the house of  
15 representatives and the senate, respectively, shall refer the petition to a standing committee of the  
16 body, which committee shall conduct a public hearing on the merits of the petition and, by a  
17 recorded vote of its members, recommend to approve or disapprove the initiative, within fifty  
18 (50) days of its referral.

19 (d) Within sixty (60) days of delivery of the initiative petition to the general assembly by  
20 the secretary of state, the proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be more than one  
21 proponent may amend the initiative, provided that the amendments further the purposes and intent  
22 of the initiative, by submitting such amendments in writing to the secretary of state for review.

23 (e) The secretary of state shall determine, within ten (10) business days of receipt of the  
24 amended petition, whether such amendments further the purposes and intent of the initiative and  
25 notify the proponent and the general assembly in writing.

26 (f) The proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be more than one proponent  
27 shall have ten (10) business days to cure any deficiencies and to deliver the amended initiative to  
28 the appropriate committee in the house of representatives and the senate.

29 (g) No later than one hundred (100) days after the secretary of state has delivered the  
30 certified initiative to the general assembly, each of the legislative committees to which the  
31 initiative has been referred shall, by a recorded vote of its members, recommend to approve or  
32 disapprove the amended initiative.

33 (h) No later than one hundred and twenty (120) days after the secretary of state has  
34 delivered the certified initiative to the general assembly, the house of representatives and the

1 senate shall take a recorded vote of its members on the provisions of the initiative.

2 (i) If, within the one hundred and twenty (120) day period following delivery by the  
3 secretary of state of a statutory initiative that has qualified for the ballot, a majority of the  
4 members in each house approves the initiative, or approves an amended version of the initiative  
5 which is endorsed by the proponent or a majority of the proponents if there be more than one  
6 proponent, the measure shall be presented to the governor and, if the governor signs it into law or  
7 allows it to become law without his or her signature, thereupon it shall become operative.

8 (j) If a statutory initiative is not so approved by the general assembly and the governor,  
9 the secretary of state shall then submit the measure at the next general election following the  
10 expiration of the one hundred and twenty (120) day period following delivery of the certified  
11 initiative by the secretary of state to the general assembly. Each legislator's name, party  
12 affiliation, electoral district, residence, and vote cast on the initiative, as well as the vote of each  
13 house by total membership and by party affiliation, shall appear in the voter information  
14 handbook in addition to the complete text of the measure.

15 (k) Upon the expiration of the one hundred and twenty (120) day period following  
16 delivery by the secretary of state to the general assembly of an initiative to amend the  
17 constitution, the secretary of state shall then submit the measure, or an amended version of the  
18 measure which is endorsed by the proponent, or by a majority of the proponents if there be more  
19 than one proponent, at the next general election.

20 **17-5.1-8. Expenditure of public money.** -- (a) If the enacted initiative petition would

21 involve expenditure of public money by the state, reduction of state revenues or raising of funds  
22 by the state by imposing any tax or incurring any indebtedness, the secretary of state, the general  
23 treasurer and the director of administration, in consultation with the senate and house fiscal  
24 advisors, shall estimate the amount of direct expenditure, direct reductions in expenditure, direct  
25 reduction in state revenues, direct tax revenue or indebtedness and interest which will be required  
26 to meet the provisions of the initiative. The estimate shall state the recurring annual amount  
27 involved or, if the initiative does not involve a recurring annual amount, the total amount.

28 (b) The officials named shall also estimate the aggregate amount of direct expenditure,  
29 direct reduction of expenditure, direct reduction on revenues, direct tax revenue or indebtedness  
30 and interest which will be required by all cities and towns to meet the provisions of the initiative.

31 (c) The estimates shall be printed in the voter information handbook and on the ballot  
32 unless the measure involves only state agency expenses not exceeding two hundred thousand  
33 dollars (\$200,000) per year.

34 The estimates shall be expressed both in absolute dollar terms and as a percentage of the

1 total current state budget. If practicable in the judgment of the general treasurer, the estimates  
2 shall be projected to reflect costs in future fiscal years.

3 (d) If the officials named determine that the measure, if it is enacted, will have no  
4 financial effect except as described in the previous paragraph, the words "no financial effect"  
5 shall be printed in the voter information handbook and on the ballot.

6 (e) Final authority and responsibility for providing the financial estimates provided  
7 within this section shall rest with the general treasurer.

8 (f) The voter information handbook distributed in connection with any ballot that  
9 contains more than one initiative proposal involving the expenditure of public money by the state,  
10 the reduction of state revenues, or the raising of funds by the state imposing any tax or incurring  
11 any indebtedness shall include an estimate of the combined cost impact which would occur if all  
12 such initiative proposals were to be approved.

13 **17-5.1-9. Severability. --** If any provision of this chapter or the application thereof to any  
14 person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or  
15 applications of the chapter, which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application,  
16 and to this end the provisions of this chapter are declared to be severable.

17 SECTION 2. Chapter 9-1 of the General Laws entitled "Causes of Action" is hereby  
18 amended by adding thereto the following section:

19 **9-1-54. Actions involving voter initiative petitioners and procedures. --** (a) The  
20 superior court shall have original jurisdiction over actions arising under chapter 5.1 of title 17 of  
21 the general laws.

22 (b) The running of any time period established by any section of chapter 5.1 of title 17  
23 shall be tolled during the pendency of such action.

24 SECTION 3. Severability. If any provision of this act or the application thereof to any  
25 person or circumstances shall be held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or  
26 applications of the act, which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and  
27 to this end the provisions of the act are declared to be severable.

28 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon ratification of a constitutional amendment  
29 entitled "JOINT RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AND PUBLISH, AND SUBMIT TO THE  
30 ELECTORS A PROPOSITION OF AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE  
31 STATE (INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM)."

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

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1           This act would provide a detailed process by which a proponent of a voter initiative and  
2 referendum proposal would present the proposal to the secretary of state, the general assembly  
3 and the governor.

4           This act would take effect upon ratification of a constitutional amendment entitled  
5 "JOINT RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AND PUBLISH, AND SUBMIT TO THE ELECTORS  
6 A PROPOSITION OF AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE  
7 (INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM)."

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