87R1362 BRG-F

By:  González of Dallas H.B. No. 1806

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the composition and duties of early voting boards and signature verification committees.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Section 87.002, Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 87.002.  COMPOSITION OF BOARD. (a) The early voting ballot board consists of a presiding judge, an alternate presiding judge, and at least two other members.

(b)  Except as provided by Subsection (d), the presiding judge and the alternate presiding judge are [~~is~~] appointed in the same manner as a presiding election judge. Except as provided by Subsection (c), the other members are appointed by the presiding judge in the same manner as the precinct election clerks.

(c)  In the general election for state and county officers, each county chair of a political party with nominees on the general election ballot shall submit to the county election board a list of names of persons eligible to serve on the early voting ballot board. The county election board shall appoint at least one person from each list to serve as a member of the early voting ballot board. The same number of members must be appointed from each list. If a political party does not submit a list, the county election board may make appointments to the board as necessary from any political party.

(d)  In addition to the members appointed under Subsection (c), the county election board shall appoint the presiding judge from the list provided under that subsection by the political party whose nominee for governor received the most votes in the county in the most recent gubernatorial general election and the alternate presiding judge from the list provided under that subsection by the political party whose nominee for governor received the second most votes in the county in the most recent gubernatorial general election.

(e)  The alternate presiding judge shall serve as presiding judge for an election if the regularly appointed presiding judge cannot serve.

SECTION 2.  Sections 87.027(d), (i), and (j), Election Code, are amended to read as follows:

(d)  The early voting clerk shall determine the number of members who are to compose the signature verification committee and shall state that number in the order calling for the committee's appointment. A committee must consist of not fewer than five members. In an election in which party alignment is indicated on the ballot, each county chair of a political party with a nominee or aligned candidate on the ballot shall submit to the appointing authority a list of names of persons eligible to serve on the signature verification committee. The authority shall appoint at least two persons from each list to serve as members of the committee. The same number of members must be appointed from each list. The authority shall appoint the chair of the committee from the list provided by the political party whose nominee for governor received the most votes in the county in the most recent gubernatorial general election. The authority shall appoint a vice chair of the committee from the list provided by a political party whose nominee for governor received the second most votes in the county in the most recent gubernatorial general election. The vice chair of the committee shall serve as the chair of the committee if the regularly appointed chair cannot serve. If a political party does not submit a list, the authority may make appointments as needed from any political party. A vacancy on the committee shall be filled by appointment from the original list or from a new list submitted by the appropriate county chair.

(i)  The signature verification committee shall compare the signature on each carrier envelope certificate, except those signed for a voter by a witness, with the signature on the voter's ballot application to determine whether the signatures are those of the voter. While the committee is reviewing signatures, an equal number of committee members from each political party that submitted a list of names under Subsection (d) shall be present to the extent practicable. The committee may also compare the signatures with any two or more signatures of the voter made within the preceding six years and on file with the county clerk or voter registrar to determine whether the signatures are those of the voter. Except as provided by Subsection (l), a determination under this subsection that the signatures are not those of the voter must be made by a majority vote of the committee's membership. If a tie vote of the committee's membership occurs, the signatures are considered to be those of the voter. The committee shall place the jacket envelopes, carrier envelopes, and applications of voters whose signatures are not those of the voter in separate containers from those of voters whose signatures are those of the voter. The committee chair shall deliver the sorted materials to the early voting ballot board at the time specified by the board's presiding judge.

(j)  If a signature verification committee is appointed, the early voting ballot board shall follow the same procedure for accepting the early voting ballots voted by mail as in an election without a signature verification committee, except that the board may not determine whether a voter's signatures on the carrier envelope certificate and ballot application are those of the same person if the committee has determined that the signatures are those of the same person. If the committee has determined that the signatures are not those of the same person, the board may make a determination that the signatures are those of the same person by a [~~majority~~] vote of at least one-half of the board's membership. If a tie vote of the board's membership occurs, the signatures are considered to be those of the same person.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect September 1, 2021.