

By: Swanson

H.B. No. 549

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the enforcement of laws relating to elections.

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

SECTION 1. Section 31.005, Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 31.005. ENFORCEMENT; PROTECTION OF VOTING RIGHTS. (a) The secretary of state may take appropriate action to protect against violations of this code and to protect the voting rights of the citizens of this state from abuse by the authorities administering the state's electoral processes.

(b) If the secretary determines that a person performing official functions in the administration of any part of the electoral processes is exercising the powers vested in that person in a manner that impedes the free exercise of a citizen's voting rights or otherwise violates a provision of this code, the secretary may order the person to correct the offending conduct. If the person fails to comply, the secretary may seek enforcement of the order by a temporary restraining order or a writ of injunction or mandamus obtained through the attorney general.

SECTION 2. The heading to Chapter 34, Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

CHAPTER 34. STATE INSPECTORS AND ELECTION MARSHALS

SECTION 3. Chapter 34, Election Code, is amended by adding Sections 34.006 and 34.007 to read as follows:

1       Sec. 34.006. ELECTION MARSHALS. (a) The secretary of state  
2 shall appoint a state election marshal. The state election marshal  
3 reports to the secretary of state.

4       (b) The state election marshal shall appoint election  
5 marshals for each Department of Public Safety region such that  
6 there is one election marshal for each 1,000,000 people who reside  
7 in the region. Appointments must be made not later than the 60th  
8 day before the date early voting is scheduled to begin in an  
9 election held on a uniform election date in November or a primary  
10 election. An appointment made under this section is in effect for  
11 90 days, and may be extended by the state election marshal if the  
12 election marshal is conducting an investigation.

13       (c) The state election marshal shall designate an election  
14 marshal in each Department of Public Safety region as the chief  
15 election marshal for the region. The chief election marshal for a  
16 region shall assign election marshals to each alleged violation of  
17 this code occurring in the region as described by Section 34.007.

18       (d) To be qualified as a state election marshal or an  
19 election marshal, a person must:

20               (1) be licensed as a peace officer by the Texas  
21 Commission on Law Enforcement;

22               (2) be commissioned by the Department of Public  
23 Safety; and

24               (3) have received training in election law from the  
25 secretary of state.

26       (e) An election marshal has the powers and duties of a state  
27 inspector under this chapter and other powers and duties as

1 assigned by law.

2 (f) The name, county of residence, and contact information  
3 for the purpose of official business of each election marshal and  
4 the state election marshal are public information.

5 Sec. 34.007. INVESTIGATION BY STATE INSPECTORS AND ELECTION  
6 MARSHALS. (a) In this section:

7 (1) "Chief election marshal" means the election  
8 marshal appointed by the secretary of state for a Department of  
9 Public Safety region.

10 (2) "Election marshal" means an election marshal  
11 appointed under Section 34.006.

12 (3) "State inspector" means a state inspector  
13 appointed under this chapter.

14 (b) A state inspector or election marshal shall promptly  
15 investigate an alleged violation of this code that is:

16 (1) supported by an affidavit or unsworn declaration;  
17 and

18 (2) submitted to the state inspector or chief election  
19 marshal, and if submitted to the chief election marshal, assigned  
20 to the election marshal.

21 (c) If an election marshal investigates an alleged  
22 violation of this code and finds probable cause exists that a  
23 violation of this code is occurring or is likely to occur, the  
24 election marshal:

25 (1) shall exercise all lawful means to prevent the  
26 violation from continuing or occurring;

27 (2) may seek such orders, processes, or warrants from

1 a court that the election marshal finds necessary to prevent the  
2 violation from continuing or occurring; and

3 (3) may also file appropriate criminal charges.

4 (d) Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to affect  
5 the right of a candidate or political party to file a civil action  
6 under other law.

7 SECTION 4. Section 273.001(a), Election Code, is amended to  
8 read as follows:

9 (a) If two or more registered voters of the territory  
10 covered by an election or an election marshal assigned to the  
11 Department of Public Safety region that includes the territory  
12 covered by an election presents [~~present~~] affidavits alleging  
13 criminal conduct in connection with the election to the county or  
14 district attorney having jurisdiction in that territory, the county  
15 or district attorney shall investigate the allegations. [~~If the~~  
16 ~~election covers territory in more than one county, the voters may~~  
17 ~~present the affidavits to the attorney general, and the attorney~~  
18 ~~general shall investigate the allegations.~~]

19 SECTION 5. The heading to Section 273.003, Election Code,  
20 is amended to read as follows:

21 Sec. 273.003. IMPOUNDING ELECTION RECORDS AND EQUIPMENT.

22 SECTION 6. Section 273.003(a), Election Code, is amended to  
23 read as follows:

24 (a) In the investigation of an election, a county or  
25 district attorney, ~~or~~ the attorney general, the secretary of  
26 state, or an election marshal may have impounded for the  
27 investigation the election returns, voted ballots, signature

1 roster, and other election records or equipment.

2 SECTION 7. The heading of Subchapter E, Chapter 273,  
3 Election Code, is amended to read as follows:

4 SUBCHAPTER E. INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AND EMERGENCY REVIEW

5 [~~INJUNCTION~~]

6 SECTION 8. Section 273.081, Election Code, is amended to  
7 read as follows:

8 Sec. 273.081. INJUNCTION. (a) A person, including a  
9 candidate, a political party, or a state, county, or precinct chair  
10 of a political party, who is being harmed or is in danger of being  
11 harmed by a violation or threatened violation of this code is  
12 entitled to appropriate injunctive relief to prevent the violation  
13 from continuing or occurring and may bring an action to obtain  
14 injunctive relief to prevent the violation from continuing or  
15 occurring.

16 (b) In connection with an action for injunctive relief filed  
17 under Subsection (a), a court may issue subpoenas of persons or  
18 property and order the inspection or impoundment of election  
19 records or equipment.

20 SECTION 9. Subchapter E, Chapter 273, Election Code, is  
21 amended by adding Sections 273.082 and 273.083 to read as follows:

22 Sec. 273.082. DISQUALIFICATION OF JUDGE. (a) The judge of  
23 a district or county court with jurisdiction over any geographic  
24 area served by an election official who is a party in a proceeding  
25 for injunctive relief under this subchapter is disqualified to  
26 preside over the proceeding, unless the election official serves  
27 statewide.

1        (b) If a petition is filed in a proceeding in which a judge  
2 may be disqualified under Subsection (a), the clerk of the court  
3 shall promptly call the filing to the attention of the judge. If  
4 the judge determines that the judge is disqualified under  
5 Subsection (a), the judge shall promptly request the presiding  
6 judge of the administrative judicial region to assign an alternate  
7 judge to preside over the proceeding.

8        (c) A judge who resides in the geographic area served by the  
9 election official who is a party under Subsection (a) is not  
10 eligible for assignment as an alternate judge for the proceeding.

11        (d) In a proceeding in which a judge is disqualified under  
12 Subsection (a), until an alternate judge is assigned to preside  
13 over the proceeding, the presiding judge of the administrative  
14 judicial region may take any action in the proceeding otherwise  
15 authorized by law, including the issuance of temporary relief.

16        Sec. 273.083. EMERGENCY REVIEW OF ELECTION ACTIVITY. (a)  
17 Not later than the 60th day before the date of a regular or special  
18 election, the presiding judge of each administrative judicial  
19 region shall appoint a sufficient number of visiting judges to  
20 serve as emergency election review judges to preside in actions  
21 under this section, in accordance with Chapter 74, Government Code.

22        (b) A judge appointed to serve as an emergency election  
23 review judge shall receive training as specified by the secretary  
24 of state at least once a year.

25        (c) An action filed by a candidate in an election or a  
26 political party or state, county, or precinct chair of a political  
27 party that has a candidate in an election that alleges a violation

1 of this code in that election and requests emergency injunctive  
2 relief to prevent the alleged violation from continuing or  
3 occurring shall be assigned to an emergency election review judge.  
4 An action under this section arising in the district or county in  
5 which the court served by an active judge appointed as an emergency  
6 election review judge has jurisdiction may not be assigned to that  
7 judge.

8 (d) A request for hearing in an action heard by an emergency  
9 election review judge shall be delivered to the assigned judge who  
10 shall promptly conduct a hearing, by electronic means or otherwise,  
11 to begin no later than:

12 (1) three hours after the judge receives a written  
13 hearing request filed not earlier than the 45th day before the date  
14 of the election and not later than the last day of in-person early  
15 voting; or

16 (2) one hour after the judge receives a written  
17 hearing request filed not earlier than the last day of in-person  
18 early voting and not later than the final canvass of an election.

19 (e) A hearing conducted by an emergency election review  
20 judge shall be recorded or transcribed and is subject to appellate  
21 review.

22 SECTION 10. This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.