MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE

REGULAR SESSION 2021

By: Senator(s) DeBar

To: Elections

SENATE BILL NO. 2108

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE "NONPARTISAN COUNTY ELECTIONS ACT"; TO 2 PROVIDE THAT THE COUNTY OFFICES OF CHANCERY CLERK, CIRCUIT CLERK, 3 TAX ASSESSOR, TAX COLLECTOR, COUNTY SURVEYOR AND COUNTY CORONER 4 SHALL BE NONPARTISAN; TO PROVIDE DEFINITIONS FOR SUCH ACT; TO 5 PROVIDE WHEN A CANDIDATE SHALL FILE THEIR INTENT AND THE AMOUNT OF 6 FEES APPLICABLE FOR SUCH OFFICE; TO PROVIDE HOW THE NAMES OF THE CANDIDATES SHALL BE GROUPED ON A BALLOT; TO PROVIDE THE PROCEDURE 7 WHEN TWO OR MORE CANDIDATES QUALIFY FOR COUNTY OFFICE; TO AMEND 8 9 SECTION 23-15-297, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO REMOVE COUNTY 10 OFFICES FROM FEE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTY NOMINATION; TO AMEND 11 SECTIONS 23-15-291, 23-15-153, 23-15-21, 23-15-31, 23-15-507 AND 12 23-15-911, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO CONFORM; AND FOR RELATED 13 PURPOSES.

14 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

15 <u>SECTION 1.</u> (1) This act shall be known and may be cited as 16 the "Nonpartisan County Elections Act."

17 (2) The purpose of this act is to provide that the following
18 county offices shall be nonpartisan: chancery clerk, circuit
19 clerk, tax assessor, tax collector, county surveyor and county

20 coroner.

21 <u>SECTION 2.</u> (1) A county office listed in Section 1 of this 22 act shall be a nonpartisan office and a candidate for election to 23 a county office is prohibited from campaigning or qualifying for

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24 such an office based on party affiliation. No committee, 25 political party, or political committee affiliated with a 26 political party shall engage in fund-raising, make any 27 contribution, nor endorse any candidate or officeholder of a 28 nonpartisan county office, or the political committee of a 29 candidate or officeholder of a nonpartisan county office. No candidate, candidate's political committee, nor officeholder of a 30 31 nonpartisan county office shall accept a contribution from any 32 committee, political party, nor political committee affiliated 33 with a political party.

34 (2) Except as otherwise provided by this act, the general
35 laws for election in this state shall apply to and govern the
36 election for county offices.

37 <u>SECTION 3.</u> (1) For purposes of this act, the following 38 words shall have the meanings provided herein, unless the context 39 clearly indicates otherwise:

40 (a) "Preferential county election" means an election 41 held for the purpose of determining those candidates for county 42 offices listed in Section 1 of this act whose names will be placed 43 on the general or regular election ballot. Any person who meets 44 the qualifications as a candidate for a county office may be a 45 candidate in the preferential county election without regard to 46 party affiliation or lack of party affiliation.

47 (b) "General election" or "regular election" means an 48 election held as provided by law in Title 23, Chapter 15,

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49 Mississippi Code of 1972, for the purpose of determining which 50 candidate shall be elected to office.

51 (c) "County office" means an office listed in Section 1 52 of this act.

(d) "Candidate" means a person who enters the race foran office listed in Section 1 of this act.

(2) All qualified electors of the State of Mississippi,
without regard to party affiliation or lack of party affiliation,
shall be qualified to vote for candidates for nomination for
county office.

59 <u>SECTION 4.</u> (1) All candidates for county office listed in 60 Section 1 of this act shall file their intent to be a candidate 61 with the proper officials not later than 5:00 p.m. sixty (60) days 62 before any general or regular election and pay the proper 63 officials One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00).

64 (2) No person shall be denied a place upon the ballot for
65 any office for which he desires to be a candidate because of his
66 inability to pay the assessment above set out.

(3) Candidates for county office shall file their intent to be a candidate with, and pay the proper assessment made pursuant to subsection (1) of this section to the circuit clerk of the county. The circuit clerk shall notify the county commissioners of election of all persons who have filed their intent to be a candidate with, and paid the proper assessment to, such clerk, within two (2) business days.

S. B. No. 2108 21/SS26/R324 PAGE 3 (ens\tb) ST: Nonpartisan elections; require for offices of chancery clerk, circuit clerk, tax assessor, tax collector, surveyor and coroner. 74 <u>SECTION 5.</u> (1) The names of candidates for county office 75 which appear on the ballot at the general election shall be 76 grouped together on a separate portion of the ballot, clearly 77 identified as nonpartisan county elections.

(2) The names of all candidates for county office shall be
listed in alphabetical order on any ballot and no reference to
political party affiliation shall appear on any ballot with
respect to any nonpartisan county office or candidate.

82 (3) The name of an unopposed candidate for county office83 shall be placed on the general election ballot.

84 **SECTION 6.** If two (2) or more candidates qualify for county office, the names of those candidates shall be placed on the 85 86 general election ballot. If any candidate for such an office receives a majority of the votes cast for such office in the 87 88 general election, he shall be declared elected. If no candidate 89 for such office receives a majority of the votes cast for such 90 office in the general election, the names of the two (2) candidates receiving the highest number of votes for such office 91 92 shall be placed on the ballot for a second election to be held 93 three (3) weeks later in accordance with appropriate procedures 94 followed in other runoff elections.

95 SECTION 7. Section 23-15-297, Mississippi Code of 1972, is 96 amended as follows:

97 23-15-297. All candidates upon entering the race for party
98 nominations for office shall first pay to the proper officer as

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99 provided for in Section 23-15-299 for each primary election and 100 all independent candidates and special election candidates shall 101 pay to the proper officer as provided for in Section 23-15-299 the 102 following amounts:

103 (a) Candidates for Governor, One Thousand Dollars104 (\$1,000.00).

(b) Candidates for Lieutenant Governor, Attorney
General, Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Auditor of Public
Accounts, Commissioner of Insurance, Commissioner of Agriculture
and Commerce, State Highway Commissioner and State Public Service
Commissioner, Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00).

110 (c) Candidates for district attorney, State Senator and
111 State Representative, Two Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$250.00).

(d) Candidates for sheriff, * * * county attorney, county superintendent of education and board of supervisors, One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00).

(e) Candidates for * * * justice court judge and constable, One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00).

117 (f) Candidates for United States Senator, One Thousand 118 Dollars (\$1,000.00).

119 (g) Candidates for United States Representative, Five 120 Hundred Dollars (\$500.00).

SECTION 8. Section 23-15-291, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

S. B. No. 2108 21/SS26/R324 PAGE 5 (ens\tb) ST: Nonpartisan elections; require for offices of chancery clerk, circuit clerk, tax assessor, tax collector, surveyor and coroner. 123 23-15-291. Except as provided in Sections 1 and 3 of this 124 <u>act</u>, all nominations for state, district, county and county 125 district officers made by the different parties of this state 126 shall be made by primary elections. All primary elections shall 127 be governed and regulated by the election laws of the state in 128 force at the time the primary election is held.

SECTION 9. Section 23-15-153, Mississippi Code of 1972, is amended as follows:

131 23-15-153. (1) At least during the following times, the election commissioners shall meet at the office of the registrar 132 133 or the office of the election commissioners to carefully revise 134 the county voter roll as electronically maintained by the 135 Statewide Elections Management System and remove from the roll the 136 names of all voters who have requested to be purged from the voter 137 roll, died, received an adjudication of non compos mentis, been 138 convicted of a disenfranchising crime, or otherwise become 139 disqualified as electors for any cause, and shall register the names of all persons who have duly applied to be registered but 140 141 have been illegally denied registration:

142 (a) On the Tuesday after the second Monday in January143 1987 and every following year;

(b) On the first Tuesday in the month immediately preceding the first primary election for members of Congress in the years when members of Congress are elected;

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151 (ii) On the first Monday in the month immediately 152 preceding the first county preferential election for nonpartisan 153 county offices in the years in which those offices are elected; 154 and

(d) On the second Monday of September preceding the general election or regular special election day in years in which a general election is not conducted.

158 Except for the names of those voters who are duly qualified 159 to vote in the election, no name shall be permitted to remain in 160 the Statewide Elections Management System; however, no name shall 161 be purged from the Statewide Elections Management System based on 162 a change in the residence of an elector except in accordance with 163 procedures provided for by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. Except as otherwise provided by Section 23-15-573, no 164 165 person shall vote at any election whose name is not in the county 166 voter roll electronically maintained by the Statewide Elections 167 Management System.

168 (2) Except as provided in this section, and subject to the 169 following annual limitations, the election commissioners shall be 170 entitled to receive a per diem in the amount of One Hundred 171 Dollars (\$100.00), to be paid from the county general fund, for

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every day or period of no less than five (5) hours accumulated over two (2) or more days actually employed in the performance of their duties in the conduct of an election or actually employed in the performance of their duties for the necessary time spent in the revision of the county voter roll as electronically maintained by the Statewide Elections Management System as required in subsection (1) of this section:

(a) In counties having less than fifteen thousand
(15,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial
census, not more than fifty (50) days per year, with no more than
fifteen (15) additional days allowed for the conduct of each
election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

(b) In counties having fifteen thousand (15,000)
residents according to the latest federal decennial census but
less than thirty thousand (30,000) residents according to the
latest federal decennial census, not more than seventy-five (75)
days per year, with no more than twenty-five (25) additional days
allowed for the conduct of each election in excess of one (1)
occurring in any calendar year;

(c) In counties having thirty thousand (30,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial census but less than seventy thousand (70,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial census, not more than one hundred (100) days per year, with no more than thirty-five (35) additional days

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197 occurring in any calendar year;

(d) In counties having seventy thousand (70,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial census but less than ninety thousand (90,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial census, not more than one hundred twenty-five (125) days per year, with no more than forty-five (45) additional days allowed for the conduct of each election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

(e) In counties having ninety thousand (90,000)
residents according to the latest federal decennial census but
less than one hundred seventy thousand (170,000) residents
according to the latest federal decennial census, not more than
one hundred fifty (150) days per year, with no more than
fifty-five (55) additional days allowed for the conduct of each
election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

212 In counties having one hundred seventy thousand (f) (170,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial 213 214 census but less than two hundred thousand (200,000) residents 215 according to the latest federal decennial census, not more than 216 one hundred seventy-five (175) days per year, with no more than 217 sixty-five (65) additional days allowed for the conduct of each 218 election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year; 219 In counties having two hundred thousand (200,000) (q) 220 residents according to the latest federal decennial census but

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less than two hundred twenty-five thousand (225,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial census, not more than one hundred ninety (190) days per year, with no more than seventy-five (75) additional days allowed for the conduct of each election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

(h) In counties having two hundred twenty-five thousand
(225,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial
census but less than two hundred fifty thousand (250,000)
residents according to the latest federal decennial census, not
more than two hundred fifteen (215) days per year, with no more
than eighty-five (85) additional days allowed for the conduct of
each election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

(i) In counties having two hundred fifty thousand
(250,000) residents according to the latest federal decennial
census but less than two hundred seventy-five thousand (275,000)
residents according to the latest federal decennial census, not
more than two hundred thirty (230) days per year, with no more
than ninety-five (95) additional days allowed for the conduct of
each election in excess of one (1) occurring in any calendar year;

(j) In counties having two hundred seventy-five
thousand (275,000) residents according to the latest federal
decennial census or more, not more than two hundred forty (240)
days per year, with no more than one hundred five (105) additional
days allowed for the conduct of each election in excess of one (1)
occurring in any calendar year.

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246 (3) In addition to the number of days authorized in 247 subsection (2) of this section, the board of supervisors of a county may authorize, in its discretion, the election 248 249 commissioners to receive a per diem in the amount provided for in 250 subsection (2) of this section, to be paid from the county general 251 fund, for every day or period of no less than five (5) hours 252 accumulated over two (2) or more days actually employed in the 253 performance of their duties in the conduct of an election or 254 actually employed in the performance of their duties for the 255 necessary time spent in the revision of the county voter roll as 256 electronically maintained by the Statewide Elections Management 257 System as required in subsection (1) of this section, not to 258 exceed five (5) days.

259 The election commissioners shall be entitled to (4)(a) 260 receive a per diem in the amount of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00), 261 to be paid from the county general fund, not to exceed ten (10) 262 days for every day or period of no less than five (5) hours 263 accumulated over two (2) or more days actually employed in the 264 performance of their duties for the necessary time spent in the 265 revision of the county voter roll as electronically maintained by 266 the Statewide Elections Management System before any special 267 election. For purposes of this paragraph, the regular special 268 election day shall not be considered a special election. The 269 annual limitations set forth in subsection (2) of this section 270 shall not apply to this paragraph.

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(b) The election commissioners shall be entitled to receive a per diem in the amount of One Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$150.00), to be paid from the county general fund, for the performance of their duties on the day of any primary, runoff, general or special election. The annual limitations set forth in subsection (2) of this section shall apply to this paragraph.

277 The board of supervisors may, in its discretion, (C) 278 pay the election commissioners an additional amount not to exceed 279 Fifty Dollars (\$50.00) for the performance of their duties at any election occurring from July 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020, 280 281 which shall be considered additional pandemic pay. Such 282 compensation shall be payable out of the county general fund, and 283 may be payable from federal funds available for such purpose, or a 284 combination of both funding sources.

285 The election commissioners shall be entitled to receive (5)286 a per diem in the amount of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00), to be 287 paid from the county general fund, not to exceed fourteen (14) days for every day or period of no less than five (5) hours 288 289 accumulated over two (2) or more days actually employed in the 290 performance of their duties for the necessary time spent in the 291 revision of the county voter roll as electronically maintained by 292 the Statewide Elections Management System and in the conduct of a 293 runoff election following either a general or special election. 294 The election commissioners shall be entitled to receive (6)

295 only one (1) per diem payment for those days when the election

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296 commissioners discharge more than one (1) duty or responsibility 297 on the same day.

298 In preparation for a municipal primary, runoff, general (7) 299 or special election, the county registrar shall generate and 300 distribute the master voter roll and pollbooks from the Statewide 301 Elections Management System for the municipality located within 302 the county. The municipality shall pay the county registrar for 303 the actual cost of preparing and printing the municipal master 304 voter roll pollbooks. A municipality may secure "read only" 305 access to the Statewide Elections Management System and print its 306 own pollbooks using this information.

307 County election commissioners who perform the duties of (8) 308 an executive committee with regard to the conduct of a primary 309 election under a written agreement authorized by law to be entered into with an executive committee shall receive per diem as 310 311 provided for in subsection (2) of this section. The days that 312 county election commissioners are employed in the conduct of a 313 primary election shall be treated the same as days county election 314 commissioners are employed in the conduct of other elections.

(9) In addition to any per diem authorized by this section, any election commissioner shall be entitled to the mileage reimbursement rate allowable to federal employees for the use of a privately owned vehicle while on official travel on election day.

320 certification setting forth the number of hours actually worked in

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321	the performance of the commissioner's official d	uties and	for
322	which the commissioner seeks compensation. The	certifica	tion must
323	be on a form as prescribed in this subsection.	The commi	ssioner's
324	signature is, as a matter of law, made under the	commissi	oner's
325	oath of office and under penalties of perjury.		
326	The certification form shall be as follows:		
327	COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSIONER		
328	PER DIEM CLAIM FORM		
329	NAME: COUNTY:		
330	ADDRESS: DISTRICT:		
331	CITY: ZIP:		
332	PURPOSE APPLICABLE	ACTUAL	PER DIEM
333	DATE BEGINNING ENDING OF MS CODE	HOURS	DAYS
334	WORKED TIME TIME WORK SECTION	WORKED	EARNED
335			
336			
337			
338	TOTAL NUMBER OF PER DIEM DAYS EARNED		
339	EXCLUDING ELECTION DAYS		
340	PER DIEM RATE PER DAY EARNED		0.00
341	TOTAL NUMBER PER DIEM DAYS EARNED		
342	FOR ELECTION DAYS		
343	PER DIEM RATE PER DAY EARNED X \$150.00		0.00
344	TOTAL AMOUNT OF PER DIEM CLAIMED		

345 I understand that I am signing this document under my oath as 346 an election commissioner and under penalties of perjury.

I understand that I am requesting payment from taxpayer funds and that I have an obligation to be specific and truthful as to the amount of hours worked and the compensation I am requesting. Signed this the ____ day of _____, ___.

351

352

When properly completed and signed, the certification must be filed with the clerk of the county board of supervisors before any payment may be made. The certification will be a public record available for inspection and reproduction immediately upon the oral or written request of any person.

Commissioner's Signature

358 Any person may contest the accuracy of the certification in 359 any respect by notifying the chair of the commission, any member 360 of the board of supervisors or the clerk of the board of 361 supervisors of the contest at any time before or after payment is 362 made. If the contest is made before payment is made, no payment 363 shall be made as to the contested certificate until the contest is 364 finally disposed of. The person filing the contest shall be 365 entitled to a full hearing, and the clerk of the board of 366 supervisors shall issue subpoenas upon request of the contestor 367 compelling the attendance of witnesses and production of documents 368 and things. The contestor shall have the right to appeal de novo to the circuit court of the involved county, which appeal must be 369

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370 perfected within thirty (30) days from a final decision of the 371 commission, the clerk of the board of supervisors or the board of 372 supervisors, as the case may be.

373 Any contestor who successfully contests any certification 374 will be awarded all expenses incident to his or her contest, 375 together with reasonable attorney's fees, which will be awarded 376 upon petition to the chancery court of the involved county upon 377 final disposition of the contest before the election commission, 378 board of supervisors, clerk of the board of supervisors, or, in 379 case of an appeal, final disposition by the court. The 380 commissioner against whom the contest is decided shall be liable 381 for the payment of the expenses and attorney's fees, and the 382 county shall be jointly and severally liable for same.

(11) Any election commissioner who has not received a certificate issued by the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 23-15-211 indicating that the election commissioner has received the required elections seminar instruction and that the election commissioner is fully qualified to conduct an election, shall not receive any compensation authorized by this section or Section 23-15-239.

390 SECTION 10. Section 23-15-21, Mississippi Code of 1972, is 391 amended as follows:

392 23-15-21. It shall be unlawful for any person who is not a 393 citizen of the United States or the State of Mississippi to 394 register or to vote in any * * * election in the state.

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395 SECTION 11. Section 23-15-31, Mississippi Code of 1972, is 396 amended as follows:

397 23-15-31. All of the provisions of this subarticle shall be 398 applicable, insofar as possible, to municipal, primary, county 399 preferential, general and special elections; and wherever therein 400 any duty is imposed or any power or authority is conferred upon 401 the county registrar, county election commissioners or county 402 executive committee with reference to a state and county election, 403 such duty shall likewise be conferred upon the municipal registrar, municipal election commission or municipal executive 404 405 committee with reference to any municipal election.

406 **SECTION 12.** Section 23-15-507, Mississippi Code of 1972, is 407 amended as follows:

408 23-15-507. No OMR equipment shall be acquired or used in 409 accordance with this chapter unless it shall:

(a) Permit eligible voters to vote at any election for all persons for whom they are lawfully entitled to vote; to vote for as many persons for an office as they are lawfully entitled to vote; to vote for or against any ballot initiative, measure or other local issue upon which they are lawfully entitled to vote;

(b) The OMR equipment shall be capable of rejecting choices marked on the ballot if the number of choices exceeds the number that the voter is entitled to vote for the office or on the measure;

S. B. No. 2108 21/SS26/R324 PAGE 17 (ens\tb) ST: Nonpartisan elections; require for offices of chancery clerk, circuit clerk, tax assessor, tax collector, surveyor and coroner. (c) Permit each voter, in presidential elections, by one (1) mark to vote for the candidates of that party for President, Vice President, and their presidential electors, or to vote individually for the electors of their choice when permitted by law;

(d) Permit each voter, in other than primary elections, to vote for the * * * <u>candidates</u> of one or more parties and for independent candidates;

427 (e) Permit each voter to vote for candidates only in428 the primary in which he or she is qualified to vote;

429 (f) Permit each voter to vote for persons whose names430 are not on the printed ballot;

(g) Be suitably designed for the purpose used, of durable construction, and may be used safely, efficiently and accurately in the conduct of elections and the counting of ballots;

435 (h) Be provided with means for sealing the ballots436 after the close of the polls;

437 (i) When properly operated, record correctly and count438 accurately all votes cast; and

(j) Provide the voter with a set of instructions that will be displayed in such a way that a voter may readily learn the method of voting.

442 **SECTION 13.** Section 23-15-911, Mississippi Code of 1972, is 443 amended as follows:

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444 23-15-911. (1)(a) When the returns for a box and the 445 contents of the ballot box and the conduct of the election have been canvassed and reviewed by the county election commission in 446 the case of general and preferential elections or the county 447 448 executive committee in the case of primary elections, all the 449 contents of the box required to be placed and sealed in the ballot 450 box by the poll managers shall be replaced therein by the election 451 commission or executive committee, as the case may be, and the box 452 shall be forthwith resealed and delivered to the circuit clerk, 453 who shall safely keep and secure the same against any tampering. 454 At any time within twelve (12) days after the canvass and 455 examination of the box and its contents by the election commission or executive committee, as the case may be, any candidate or his 456 457 or her representative authorized in writing by him or her shall 458 have the right of full examination of the box and its contents 459 upon three (3) days' notice of his or her application therefor 460 served upon the opposing candidates. The service of notice shall be provided to each opposing candidate by delivering a copy 461 462 personally to each candidate, or by performing two (2) of the 463 following:

(i) By leaving a copy at each candidate's usual
place of residence with a family member, who shall be no less than
sixteen (16) years of age and, who resides in the candidate's
residence;

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(iii) By mailing a copy of the notice by registered or certified mail that is addressed to each opposing candidate at that candidate's residence with receipt deemed mailing.

474 If service of notice cannot be made to any opposing (b) 475 candidate, then notice may be posted on the door of each 476 candidate's usual place of abode. If any candidate's usual place 477 of residence is a multi-family dwelling, a copy of the notice must 478 be mailed to the candidate or candidates by United States 479 first-class mail, postage prepaid, return receipt requested. 480 Proof of service of notice upon any opposing candidate shall be 481 made to the circuit clerk within three (3) days before a full 482 examination of the ballot box may be conducted.

483 (C) The examination shall be conducted in the presence 484 of the circuit clerk or his or her deputy who shall be charged with the duty to see that none of the contents of the box are 485 486 removed from the presence of the clerk or in any way tampered 487 Upon the completion of the examination the box shall be with. 488 resealed with all its original contents inside. And if any 489 contest or complaint before the court shall arise over the box, it 490 shall be kept intact and sealed until the court hearing and 491 another ballot box, if necessary, shall be furnished for the 492 precinct involved.

S. B. No. 2108 21/SS26/R324 PAGE 20 (ens\tb) ST: Nonpartisan elections; require for offices of chancery clerk, circuit clerk, tax assessor, tax collector, surveyor and coroner. (2) The provisions of this section allowing the examination of ballot boxes shall apply in the case of an election contest regarding the seat of a member of the state Legislature. In such a case, the results of the examination shall be reported by the applicable circuit clerk to the Clerk of the House of Representatives or the Secretary of the Senate, as the case may be.

500 **SECTION 14.** This act shall take effect and be in force from 501 and after July 1, 2021.

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