

CHAPTER 12

PROHIBITED ELECTION PRACTICES

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12.01 Definitions. (1) The definitions given under s. 11.01 apply to this chapter, except that a "candidate" includes candidates for national office.

(2) In this chapter, "election official" means any person charged with any duties relating to the conduct of elections under chs. 5 to 12.

History: 1973 c. 334; 1975 c. 93; 1977 c. 427; 1979 c. 89

12.02 Construction. In this chapter, criminal intent shall be construed in accordance with s. 939.23.

History: 1977 c. 427.

12.03 Election day campaigning restricted. (1) No election official under chs. 5 to 12 may engage in electioneering on election day.

(2) No person may engage in electioneering during polling hours on election day within 500 feet of an entrance to a building containing a polling place.

(3) A municipal clerk, election inspector or law enforcement officer may remove posters or other advertising which is placed in violation of this section.

(4) In this section, "electioneering" means any activity which is intended to influence voting at an election.

History: 1973 c. 334; 1977 c. 427; 1979 c. 89.

Violators may not be deprived of the right to vote, although penalties may follow. Constitutional issues discussed. 61 Atty Gen. 441.

12.05 False statements affecting candidates. No person may knowingly make or publish, or cause to be made or published, a false representation pertaining to a candidate which is intended or tends to affect voting at an election.

History: 1973 c. 334.

12.07 Election restrictions on employers.

(1) No person may refuse an employe the privilege of time off for voting under s. 6.76 or subject an employe to a penalty therefor.

(2) No employer may refuse to allow an employe to serve as an election official or make any threats or offer any inducements of any kind to the employe for the purpose of preventing the employe from so serving.

(3) No employer or his agent may distribute to any of his employes printed matter containing any threat, notice or information that if a particular ticket of a political party or organization or candidate is elected or any referendum question is adopted or rejected, work in his place or establishment will cease, in whole or in part, or his place or establishment will be closed, or the salaries or wages of his employes will be reduced, or other threats intended to influence the political opinions or actions of his employes.

History: 1973 c. 334.

12.09 Election threats. No person may by himself or through an agent make use of or threaten to make use of force, violence or restraint in order to induce or compel any person to vote or refrain from voting at an election; or, by abduction, duress or any fraudulent device or contrivance, impede or prevent the free exercise of the franchise at an election; or by his acts compel, induce or prevail upon an elector either to give or refrain from giving his vote at any election for or against a particular candidate or referendum.

History: 1973 c. 334.

12.11 Election bribery. (1) Any person who does any of the following violates this chapter:

(a) Offers, gives, lends or promises to give or lend, or endeavors to procure, any thing of value, or any office or employment or any privilege or immunity to, or for, any elector, or to or for any other person, in order to induce any elector to:

1. Go to or refrain from going to the polls.
2. Vote or refrain from voting.
3. Vote or refrain from voting for or against a particular person.

4. Vote or refrain from voting for or against a particular referendum; or on account of any elector having done any of the above.

(b) Receives, agrees or contracts to receive or accept any money, gift, loan, valuable consideration, office or employment for himself or for any other person, in consideration that he or any elector will so act or has so acted.

(c) Advances, pays or causes to be paid any money to or for the use of any person with the intent that such money or any part thereof will be used to bribe electors at any election.

(2) This section applies to any convention or meeting held for the purpose of nominating any candidate for any election, and to the signing of any nomination paper.

(3) This section does not prohibit a candidate from publicly stating his preference for or support of any other candidate for any office to be voted for at the same election. A candidate for office in which the person elected is charged with the duty of participating in the election or nomination of any person as a candidate for office is not prohibited from publicly stating or pledging his preference for or support of any person for such office or nomination. This section does not extend to money paid or agreed to be paid for or on account of authorized legal expenses which were legitimately incurred at or concerning any election. This section does not apply where an employer agrees that all or part of election day be given to his employees as a paid holiday, provided that such policy is made uniformly applicable to all similarly situated employees. This section does not prohibit any person from using his own vehicle to transport electors to or from the polls without charge.

(4) The term "any thing of value" as used in this section includes money or any object which has utility independent of any political message contained therein, the value of which exceeds 10 cents. The prohibitions of this section apply to the distribution of material printed at public expense and available for free distribution if such materials are accompanied by a political message.

History: 1973 c. 334; 1975 c. 93.

12.13 Election fraud. (1) ELECTORS. Whoever intentionally does any of the following violates this chapter:

(a) Votes at any election or meeting if he does not have the necessary elector qualifications and residence requirements.

(b) Falsely procures registration or makes false statements to the board of registry or inspector of elections whether or not under oath.

(c) Registers as an elector in more than one place for the same election.

(d) Impersonates a registered elector or poses as another person for the purpose of voting at an election.

(e) Votes more than once in the same election.

(f) Shows his or her marked, punched or labeled ballot to any person or places a mark upon the ballot so it is identifiable as his or her ballot.

(g) Procures an official ballot and neglects or refuses to cast or return it. This paragraph does not apply to persons who have applied for and received absentee ballots.

(h) Procures, assists or advises someone to do any of the acts prohibited by this subsection.

(2) (a) The wilful neglect or refusal by an election official to perform any of the duties prescribed under chs. 5 to 12 is a violation of this chapter.

(b) No election official may:

1. Observe how an elector has marked his ballot unless he is requested to assist the elector; intentionally permit anyone not authorized to assist in the marking of a ballot to observe how a person is voting or has voted; or disclose to anyone how an elector voted other than as is necessary in the course of judicial proceedings.

2. Illegally issue, write, change or alter a ballot on election day.

3. Permit registration or receipt of a vote from a person who he knows is not a legally qualified elector or who has refused after being challenged to make the oath or to properly answer the necessary questions pertaining to the requisite requirements and residence; or put into the ballot box a ballot other than his own or other one lawfully received.

4. Intentionally assist or cause to be made a false statement, canvass, certificate or return of the votes cast at any election.

5. Wilfully alter or destroy a poll or registration list.

6. Intentionally permit or cause a voting machine, voting device or automatic tabulating equipment to fail to correctly register or record a vote cast thereon or inserted therein, or tamper with or disarrange the machine, device or equipment or any part or appliance thereof; cause or consent to the machine, device or automatic tabulating equipment being used for voting at an election with knowledge that it is out of order or is not perfectly set and adjusted so that it will correctly register or record all votes cast thereon or inserted therein; with the purpose of defrauding or deceiving any elector, cause doubt for what party, candidate or proposition a vote will be cast or cause the vote for one party, candidate or proposition to be cast so it appears to be cast for another; or remove, change or mutilate a ballot on a voting machine, device or a ballot to be inserted into automatic tabulating equipment, or do any similar act contrary to chs. 5 to 12.

7. In the course of the person's official duties or on account of the person's official position, intentionally violate or intentionally cause any other person to violate any provision of chs. 5 to 12 for which no other penalty is expressly prescribed.

(3) PROHIBITED ACTS. No person may:

(a) Falsely make, make an oath to or fraudulently deface or destroy a certificate of nomination or nomination paper; or file or receive for filing a certificate of nomination or nomination paper knowing any part is falsely made.

(am) Fail to file an oath as required by s. 8.15 (4) (b) with respect to residency or a change in residency for voting purposes within 3 days of the time such oath becomes due for filing; or file a false oath with respect to residency or a change in residency under s. 8.15 (4) (b). This paragraph applies only to candidates for state or local office.

(b) Wrongfully suppress, neglect or fail to file nomination papers in his possession at the proper time and in the proper office; suppress a certificate of nomination which is duly filed.

(c) Wilfully or negligently fail to deliver, after having undertaken to do so, official ballots prepared for an election to the proper person, or prevent their delivery within the required time, or destroy or conceal the ballots.

(d) Remove or destroy any of the supplies or conveniences placed in compartments or polling booths.

(e) Prepare or cause to be prepared an official ballot with intent to change the result of the election as to any candidate or referendum; prepare an official ballot which is premarked, prepunched or prelabeled prior to delivery to an elector; or deliver to an elector an official ballot bearing a mark, label or punch opposite the name of a candidate or referendum question that might be counted as a vote for or against a candidate or question.

(f) Before or during any election, tamper with voting machines, voting devices or automatic tabulating equipment readied for voting or the counting of votes; disarrange, deface, injure or impair any such machine, device or equipment; or mutilate, injure or destroy a ballot placed or displayed on a voting machine or device, or to be placed or displayed on any such machine, device or automatic tabulating equipment or any other appliance used in connection with the machine, device or equipment.

(g) Falsify any affidavit or other statement relating to voter registration under chs. 5 to 12.

(h) Deface, destroy or remove any legally placed election campaign advertising poster with intent to disrupt the campaign advertising efforts of any candidate, or of any committee,

group or individual under ch. 11, or alter the information printed thereon so as to change the meaning thereof to the disadvantage of the candidate or cause espoused. Nothing in this paragraph restricts the right of any owner or occupant of any real property, or the owner or operator of any motor vehicle, to remove campaign advertising posters from such property or vehicle.

(i) Falsely make any statement for the purpose of obtaining an absentee ballot pursuant to s. 6.87.

(j) While assisting an elector who cannot read or write, has difficulty in reading, writing or understanding English, or is unable to mark, punch or label a ballot or depress a lever or button on a voting machine, inform the elector that a ballot contains names or words different than are printed or displayed on the ballot with the intent of inducing the elector to vote contrary to his or her inclination or intentionally fail to cast a vote in accordance with the elector's instructions.

(k) Forge or falsely make the official indorsement on a ballot or knowingly deposit a ballot in the ballot box upon which the names or initials of the ballot clerks, or those of issuing clerks do not appear.

(l) When not authorized, during or after an election, break open or violate the seals or locks on a ballot box containing ballots of that election or obtain unlawful possession of a ballot box with official ballots; conceal, withhold or destroy ballots or ballot boxes; wilfully, fraudulently or forcibly add to or diminish the number of ballots legally deposited in a ballot box; or aid or abet any person in doing any of the acts prohibited by this paragraph.

(m) Fraudulently change a ballot of an elector so the elector is prevented from voting for whom he intended.

(n) Receive a ballot from or give a ballot to a person other than the election official in charge.

(o) Vote or offer to vote a ballot except as has been received from one of the ballot clerks.

(p) Receive a completed ballot from a voter unless qualified to do so.

(q) Solicit a person to show how his or her vote is cast.

(r) Remove a ballot from a polling place before the polls are closed.

(s) Solicit another elector to offer assistance inside a voting booth under s. 6.82 (2), except in the case of an elector who is blind or visually impaired to the extent that the elector cannot read a ballot.

(t) Obtain an absentee ballot as the agent of another elector under s. 6.86 (2) and fail or refuse to deliver it to such elector.

(u) Present false identification for the purpose of inducing an election official to permit the person to vote.

(v) Corroborate any information offered by a proposed elector for the purpose of permitting the person to vote, knowing such information to be false.

(w) Falsify a ballot application under s. 6.18.

(x) Refuse to obey a lawful order of an inspector made for the purpose of enforcing the election laws; engage in disorderly behavior at or near a polling place; or interrupt or disturb the voting or canvassing proceedings.

(y) After an election, break the locks or seals or reset the counters on a voting machine except in the course of official duties carried out at the time and in the manner prescribed by law; or disable a voting machine so as to prevent an accurate count of the votes from being obtained; or open the registering or recording compartments of a machine with intent to do any such act.

(z) Tamper with automatic tabulating equipment or any record of votes cast or computer program which is to be used in connection with such equipment to count or recount votes at any election so as to prevent or attempt to prevent an accurate count of the votes from being obtained.

History: 1973 c. 334; 1975 c. 85, 93, 199; 1977 c. 427, 447; 1979 c. 89, 249, 260, 311, 357.

See note to 9.01, citing Appeal From Recount in Election Contest, 105 W (2d) 468, 313 NW (2d) 869 (Ct. App. 1981).

12.60 Penalties. (1) (a) Whoever violates s. 12.05, 12.09, 12.11 or 12.13 (1), (2) or (3) (a), (e), (f), (j), (k), (L), (m), (y) or (z) may be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than 3 years in the Wisconsin state prisons or both.

(b) Whoever violates s. 12.03, 12.07 or 12.13 (3) (b), (c), (d), (g), (i) or (n) to (x) may be fined not more than \$1,000, or imprisoned not more than 6 months, or both.

(c) Whoever violates s. 12.13 (3) (am) may be required to forfeit not more than \$500.

(d) Whoever violates s. 12.13 (3) (h) may be required to forfeit not more than \$100.

(2) (a) If a successful candidate for public office, other than a candidate for the legislature or a candidate for national office, is adjudged guilty in a criminal action of any violation of this chapter under sub. (1) (a) committed during his or her candidacy, the court shall after entering judgment enter a supplemental judgment declaring a forfeiture of the candidate's right to office. The supplemental judgment shall be transmitted to the officer or agency authorized to issue the certificate of nomination or election to the office for which the person convicted is a candidate. If the candidate's term has begun, the office shall become vacant. The office shall then be filled in the manner provided by law.

(b) If a successful candidate for the legislature or U.S. congress is adjudged guilty in a criminal action of any violation of this chapter under sub. (1) (a) committed during his or her candidacy, the court shall after entering judgment certify its findings to the presiding officer of the legislative body to which the candidate was elected.

(3) Any election official who is convicted of any violation of this chapter shall, in addition to the punishment otherwise provided, be disqualified to act as an election official for a term of 5 years from the time of conviction.

(4) Prosecutions under this chapter shall be conducted in accordance with s. 11.61 (2).

History: 1973 c. 334; 1975 c. 85; 1977 c. 418 s. 924 (18) (e); 1977 c. 427; 1979 c. 249, 311, 328.

12.66 Injunction to compel compliance.

The attorney general or the district attorney of the county where a violation of this chapter is alleged to occur may sue for injunctive relief to compel compliance with this chapter. No bond is required in such actions.

History: 1973 c. 334.