

Lawmakers Pass Bill to Force Trump to Release Tax Returns or Be Left Off Ballot

Ever since President **Donald Trump** was campaigning going into the 2016 election, people have called for him to release his tax returns, a tradition followed by candidates for decades. It never came to pass, with Trump claiming he was under audit. Now, as the country prepares for the next election cycle, lawmakers in New Jersey are trying to force Trump's hand with an ultimatum: turn over the tax returns, or be left off the ballot.

The State Senate passed a bill on Thursday that would require presidential and vice presidential candidates to release their tax returns for the previous five years—at least 50 days before the general election—in order to qualify to have their names on the ballot. The bill says that they would have to file copies with the Division of Elections in the Department of State, and also consent to having them made public. The Division of Elections would then post them online within seven days of receiving them. The bill does allow for redactions to be made, where the Division and State Attorney General deem appropriate.

The bill, known as S-119, also aims to block a loophole by preventing the state's electors from going off on their own and voting for someone who doesn't comply.

"An elector shall not vote for a candidate for President or Vice-President of the United States, unless the candidate had filed, or caused to be filed, the candidate's federal income tax return in accordance with [the bill]," it says.

The bill says it would go into effect immediately, upon being signed into law, to ensure that it applies to the next presidential election.

The bill still has to go to the State Assembly for a vote before it goes to the desk of Gov. **Phil Murphy** (D). A similar bill passed both houses in 2017, but then-Governor **Chris Christie** (R), a friend of Trump who campaigned for him, vetoed it. Other states have tried similar measures, but none have become law.

With a Democratic governor, New Jersey could be the first state to enact a law

like this, but that doesn't mean it will last. There will certainly be legal challenges well before the 2020 election.

New Jersey attorney **John Carbone** pointed out issues to the *Courier Post*.

"It's just political pandering," said Carbone, whose practice includes election law. "They can impose no requirements for a candidate for federal office, let alone president."

Trump has a long history with the State of New Jersey. He was once known for casinos in Atlantic City, and he continues to run the well-known Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster.

[Image via NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP/Getty Images]

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