

§ 163-230.1. Simultaneous issuance of absentee ballots with application.

(a) Written Request. – A qualified voter who is eligible to vote by absentee ballot under G.S. 163-226, or that voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian, shall complete a request form for an absentee application and absentee ballots so that the county board receives that completed request form not later than 5:00 P.M. on the second Tuesday before the election. That completed written request form shall be in compliance with G.S. 163-230.2. The county board shall enter in the register of absentee requests, applications, and ballots issued the information required in G.S. 163-228 as soon as each item of that information becomes available. Upon receiving the completed request form, the county board shall cause to be mailed to that voter a single package that includes all of the following:

- (1) The official ballots the voter is entitled to vote.
- (2) A container-return envelope for the ballots, printed in accordance with G.S. 163-229.
- (3) An instruction sheet.
- (4) A clear statement of the requirement for a photocopy of identification described in G.S. 163-166.16(a) or an affidavit as described in G.S. 163-166.16(d)(1), (d)(2), or (d)(3) with the returned ballot.

(a1) Mailing of Application and Ballots. – The ballots, envelope, and instructions shall be mailed to the voter by the county board's chair, member, officer, or employee as determined by the county board and entered in the register as provided by this Article.

(a2) Publish Deadline for Written Request and Ballot. – At least once per primary or election, each county board and the State Board shall publish on its website or in any mailing sent to voters the following information:

- (1) The date by which a completed request form as described in subsection (a) of this section must be received by a county board.
- (2) The means by which the voter's marked absentee ballot must be returned to the county board.
- (3) The date and time the voter's completed absentee ballot must be received by the county board in order to be counted.

(b) Absence for Sickness or Physical Disability. – Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, if a voter expects to be unable to go to the voting place to vote in person on election day because of that voter's sickness or other physical disability, that voter or that voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian may make the request for absentee ballots in person to the county board of the county in which the voter is registered after 5:00 P.M. on the second Tuesday before the election but not later than 5:00 P.M. on the last business day before the election. The county board shall treat that completed request form in the same manner as a request under subsection (a) of this section but may personally deliver the application and ballots to the voter or that voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian, and shall enter in the register of absentee requests, applications, and ballots issued the information required in G.S. 163-228 as soon as each item of that information becomes available. The county board shall personally deliver to the requester in a single package:

- (1) The official ballots the voter is entitled to vote.
- (2) A container-return envelope for the ballots, printed in accordance with G.S. 163-229.
- (3) An instruction sheet.
- (4) A clear statement of the requirement for a photocopy of identification described in G.S. 163-166.16(a) or an affidavit as described in G.S. 163-166.16(d)(1), (d)(2), or (d)(3) with the returned application and voted ballots.

(c) Delivery of Absentee Ballots and Container-Return Envelope to Applicant. – When the county board receives a completed request form for applications and absentee ballots from the voter, or the near relative or the verifiable legal guardian of that voter, the county board shall promptly issue and transmit them to the voter in accordance with the following instructions:

- (1) On the top margin of each absentee ballot the applicant is entitled to vote, the chair, a member, officer, or employee of the county board shall write or type the words "Absentee Ballot No. ____ " or an abbreviation approved by the State Board and insert in the blank space the number assigned the applicant's application in the register of absentee requests, applications, and absentee ballots issued. That person shall not write, type, or print any other matter upon the absentee ballots transmitted to the absentee voter. Alternatively, the county board may cause to be barcoded on the absentee ballot the voter's application number, if that barcoding system is approved by the State Board.
- (2) The chair, member, officer, or employee of the county board shall fold and place the absentee ballots (identified in accordance with the preceding instruction) in a container-return envelope and write or type in the appropriate blanks thereon, in accordance with the terms of G.S. 163-229(b), the absentee voter's name, the absentee voter's application number, and the designation of the precinct in which the voter is registered. If the absentee ballot is barcoded under this section, the envelope may be barcoded rather than having the actual number appear. The person placing the absentee ballots in the envelopes shall leave the container-return envelope holding the absentee ballots unsealed.
- (3) The chair, member, officer, or employee of the county board shall then place the unsealed container-return envelope holding the absentee ballots together with printed instructions for voting and returning the absentee ballots, in an envelope addressed to the voter at the post office address stated in the request, seal the envelope, and mail it at the expense of the county board: Provided, that in case of a request received after 5:00 P.M. on the second Tuesday before the election under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, in lieu of transmitting the absentee ballots to the voter in person or by mail, the chair, member, officer, or employee of the county board may deliver the sealed envelope containing the instruction sheet and the container-return envelope holding the absentee ballots to a near relative or verifiable legal guardian of the voter.

The county board may receive completed written request forms for applications at any time prior to the election but shall not mail applications and absentee ballots to the voter or issue applications and absentee ballots in person earlier than 60 days prior to the statewide general election in an even-numbered year, or earlier than 50 days prior to any other election. No election official shall issue applications for absentee ballots except in compliance with this Article.

(d) Voter to Complete. – The application shall be completed and signed by the voter personally, the absentee ballots marked, the absentee ballots sealed in the container-return envelope, and the certificate completed as provided in G.S. 163-231.

(e) Approval of Applications. – At its next official meeting prior to election day after the return of the completed container-return envelope with the voter's absentee ballots, the county board shall determine whether the container-return envelope has been properly executed. If the county board determines that the container-return envelope has been properly executed, it shall approve the application and deposit the container-return envelope with other container-return envelopes for the envelope to be opened and the absentee ballots counted at the same time as all other container-return envelopes and absentee ballots.

(e1) Curable Deficiencies. – If a container-return envelope contains a curable deficiency, the county board shall promptly notify the voter of the deficiency and the manner in which the voter may cure the deficiency. Curable deficiencies are deficiencies that can be cured with supplemental documentation or attestation provided by the voter, including when any of the following occurs:

- (1) The voter did not sign the voter certification as required by G.S. 163-231(a)(4).
- (2) The voter signed the application in the wrong place on the application.
- (3) The voter failed to include with the container-return envelope a photocopy of identification described in G.S. 163-166.16(a) or an affidavit as described in G.S. 163-166.16(d)(1), (d)(2), or (d)(3), as required by subsection (f1) of this section.

The identification of the two persons witnessing the casting of the absentee ballot in accordance with G.S. 163-231(a) is not a curable deficiency. Any container-return envelope with a curable deficiency that is transmitted to the county board shall be considered timely if cure documentation is received no later than 12:00 p.M. on the third business day after the election. Cure documentation may be transmitted via email to the county board if the deficiency is one described in subdivision (3) of this subsection. The notification of voters regarding curable deficiencies is an administrative task that may be performed by county board staff and is not required to be performed at an absentee meeting as provided for in subsection (f) of this section. The voter shall be notified of curable deficiencies by mail, and by telephone or email if the telephone number or email address was provided by the voter on the request form for absentee ballots.

(f) Required Meeting of County Board of Elections. – During the period commencing on the fifth Tuesday before an election, in which absentee ballots are authorized, the county board shall hold one or more public meetings each Tuesday at 5:00 P.M. for the purpose of action on applications for absentee ballots. At these meetings, the county board shall pass upon applications for absentee ballots.

If the county board changes the time of holding its meetings or provides for additional meetings in accordance with the terms of this subsection, notice of the change in hour and notice of the schedule of additional meetings, if any, shall be published in a newspaper circulated in the county at least 30 days prior to the election.

At the time the county board makes its decision on an application for absentee ballots, the county board shall enter in the appropriate column in the register of absentee requests, applications, and ballots issued opposite the name of the applicant a notation of whether the applicant's application was "Approved" or "Disapproved".

The decision of the county board on the validity of an application for absentee ballots shall be final subject only to such review as may be necessary in the event of an election contest. The county board shall constitute the proper official body to pass upon the validity of all applications for absentee ballots received in the county; this function shall not be performed by the chair or any other member of the county board individually.

(f1) [Identification or Affidavit. –] Each container-return envelope returned to the county board with application and voted ballots under this section shall be accompanied by a photocopy of identification described in G.S. 163-166.16(a) or an affidavit as described in G.S. 163-166.16(d)(1), (d)(2), or (d)(3).

(g) Rules. – The State Board, by rule or by instruction to the county boards of elections, shall establish procedures to provide appropriate safeguards in the implementation of this section. The State Board shall adopt rules to provide for the forms of identification that shall be included with returned application and voted absentee ballots. At a minimum, the rules shall include the following:

- (1) Acceptable photocopies of forms of readable identification, as described in G.S. 163-166.16(a).
 - (2) A process for a voter without acceptable photocopies of forms of readable identification under subdivision (1) of this subsection to complete an alternative affidavit in accordance with G.S. 163-166.16(d)(1), (d)(2), or (d)(3) that includes inability to attach a physical copy of the voter's identification with the returned application and voted ballots as a reasonable impediment to compliance with the identification requirement, provided the reasonable impediment includes one of the following:
 - a. The number of the voter's North Carolina drivers license issued under Article 2 of Chapter 20 of the General Statutes, including a learner's permit or a provisional license.
 - b. The number of the voter's special identification card for nonoperators issued under G.S. 20-37.7.
 - c. The last four digits of the voter's social security number.
- (h) Recodified as G.S. 163-226(f) by Session Laws 2019-239, s. 1.2(a), effective January 1, 2020, and applicable to elections conducted on or after that date. (1983, c. 304, s. 1; 1985, c. 759, ss. 5.1-5.5; 1991, c. 727, s. 6.3; 1993, c. 553, s. 67; 1995, c. 243, s. 1; 1999-455, s. 10; 2001-337, s. 3; 2002-159, s. 55(m); 2009-537, s. 5; 2013-381, s. 4.2; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-144, s. 3.4(i); 2018-146, s. 3.1(a), (b); 2019-239, s. 1.2(a), (b); 2020-17, s. 4; 2023-139, s. 6.5; 2023-140, s. 35; 2024-57, s. 3A.4(f).)