§ 163-231. Voting absentee ballots and transmitting them to the county board of elections.

(a) Procedure for Voting Absentee Ballots. – In the presence of two persons who are at least 18 years of age, and who are not disqualified by G.S. 163-226.3(a)(4) or G.S. 163-237(c), the voter shall do all of the following:

(1) Mark the voter's ballots, or cause them to be marked by that person in the voter's presence according to the voter's instruction.

(2) Fold each ballot separately, or cause each of them to be folded in the voter's presence.

(3) Place the folded ballots in the container-return envelope and securely seal it, or have this done in the voter's presence.

(4) Make the application printed on the container-return envelope according to the provisions of G.S. 163-229(b) and make the certificate printed on the container-return envelope according to the provisions of G.S. 163-229(b).

(5) Require those two persons in whose presence the voter marked that voter's ballots to sign the application and certificate as witnesses and to indicate those persons' addresses. Failure to list a ZIP code does not invalidate the application and certificate.

(6) Do one of the following:

a. Have the application notarized. The notary public may be the person in whose presence the voter marked that voter's ballot.

b. Have the two persons in whose presence the voter marked that voter's ballots to certify that the voter is the registered voter submitting the marked ballots.

Alternatively to the prior paragraph of this subsection, any requirement for two witnesses shall be satisfied if witnessed by one notary public, who shall comply with all the other requirements of that paragraph. The notary shall affix a valid notarial seal to the envelope, and include the word "Notary Public" below his or her signature.

The persons in whose presence the ballot is marked shall at all times respect the secrecy of the ballot and the privacy of the absentee voter, unless the voter requests assistance and that person is otherwise authorized by law to give assistance. When thus executed, the sealed container-return envelope, with the ballots enclosed, shall be transmitted in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section to the county board of elections which issued the ballots.

(b) Transmitting Executed Absentee Ballots to County Board of Elections. – The sealed container-return envelope in which executed absentee ballots have been placed shall be transmitted to the county board of elections who issued those ballots as follows:

(1) All ballots issued under the provisions of this Article and Article 21A of this Chapter shall be transmitted by mail or by commercial courier service, at the voter's expense, or delivered in person, or by the voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian and received by the county board not later than 5:00 p.m. on the day of the statewide primary or general election or county bond election. Ballots issued under the provisions of Article 21A of this Chapter may also be electronically transmitted.

(2) If ballots are received later than the hour stated in subdivision (1) of this subsection, those ballots shall not be accepted unless one of the following applies:

a. Federal law so requires.

b. The ballots issued under this Article are postmarked and that postmark is dated on or before the day of the statewide primary or general

election or county bond election and are received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m.

c. The ballots issued under Article 21A of this Chapter are received by the county board of elections not later than the end of business on the business day before the canvass conducted by the county board of elections held pursuant to G.S. 163-182.5.

(c) For purposes of this section, "Delivered in person" includes delivering the ballot to an election official at a one-stop voting site under G.S. 163-227.2, 163-227.5, and 163-227.6 during any time that site is open for voting. The ballots shall be kept securely and delivered by election officials at that site to the county board of elections office for processing. (1939, c. 159, ss. 2, 5; 1941, c. 248; 1943, c. 736; c. 751, s. 1; 1945, c. 758, s. 5; 1963, c. 457, ss. 2, 5; 1967, c. 775, s. 1; 1971, c. 1247, s. 3; 1973, c. 536, s. 1; 1977, c. 469, s. 1; 1979, c. 799, s. 5; 1985, c. 562, ss. 1, 2; 1987, c. 583, ss. 1, 2; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 991, s. 4; 1999-455, s. 11; 2009-537, ss. 6, 8(a); 2011-182, s. 5; 2013-381, s. 4.4; 2014-111, s. 11; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-144, s. 3.4(j); 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 4.8.)