

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2007

H

D

HOUSE DRH70005-LB-36 (1/23)

Short Title: Superior Court Judge Elections.

(Public)

Sponsors: Representative Wainwright.

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO PROVIDE THAT EACH SUPERIOR COURT JUDGESHIP SHALL BE ELECTED SEPARATELY, AS IS ALREADY PROVIDED FOR THE APPELLATE DIVISION AND DISTRICT COURT, AND THAT VACANCIES SHALL BE FILLED AT THE NEXT ELECTION FOR A FULL EIGHT-YEAR TERM AS IS ALREADY PROVIDED FOR THE APPELLATE DIVISION.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** G.S 163-9 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 163-9. Filling vacancies in State and district judicial offices.**

(a) Vacancies occurring in the offices of Justice of the Supreme Court, judge of the Court of Appeals, and judge of the superior court for causes other than expiration of term shall be filled by appointment of the Governor. An appointee to ~~the office of Justice of the Supreme Court or judge of the Court of Appeals~~ any of those offices shall hold office until January 1 next following the election for members of the General Assembly that is held more than 60 days after the vacancy occurs, at which time an election shall be held for an eight-year term and until a successor is elected and qualified.

~~(b) Except for judges specified in the next paragraph of this subsection, an appointee to the office of judge of superior court shall hold his place until the next election for members of the General Assembly that is held more than 60 days after the vacancy occurs, at which time an election shall be held to fill the unexpired term of the office.~~

~~Appointees for judges of the superior court from any district:~~

~~(1) With only one resident judge; or~~

~~(2) In which no county is subject to section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965,~~

1 shall hold the office until the next election of members of the General Assembly that is  
2 held more than 60 days after the vacancy occurs, at which time an election shall be held  
3 to fill an eight-year term.

4 (c) When the unexpired term of the office in which the vacancy has occurred  
5 expires on the first day of January succeeding the next election for members of the  
6 General Assembly, the Governor shall appoint to fill that vacancy for the unexpired  
7 term of the office.

8 (d) Vacancies in the office of district judge which occur before the expiration of  
9 a term shall not be filled by election. Vacancies in the office of district judge shall be  
10 filled in accordance with G.S. 7A-142."

11 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 163-322 reads as rewritten:

12 "**§ 163-322. Nonpartisan primary election method.**

13 (a) General. – Except as provided in G.S. 163-329, there shall be a primary to  
14 narrow the field of candidates to two candidates for each position to be filled if, when  
15 the filing period closes, there are more than two candidates for a single office or the  
16 number of candidates for a group of offices exceeds twice the number of positions to be  
17 filled. office. If only one or two candidates file for a single office, no primary shall be  
18 held for that office and the candidates shall be declared nominated. ~~If the number of~~  
19 ~~candidates for a group of offices does not exceed twice the number of positions to be~~  
20 ~~filled, no primary shall be held for those offices and the candidates shall be declared~~  
21 ~~nominated.~~

22 (b) Determination of Nominees. – In the primary, the two candidates for a single  
23 office receiving the highest number of votes, ~~and those candidates for a group of offices~~  
24 ~~receiving the highest number of votes, equal to twice the number of positions to be~~  
25 ~~filled, votes shall be declared nominated.~~ If two or more candidates receiving the  
26 highest number of votes each receive the same number of votes, the State Board of  
27 Elections shall determine their relative ranking by lot, and shall declare the nominees  
28 accordingly. The canvass of the primary shall be held on the same date as the primary  
29 canvass fixed under G.S. 163-182.5. The canvass shall be conducted in accordance with  
30 Article 15A of this Chapter.

31 (c) Determination of Election Winners. – In the election, the names of those  
32 candidates declared nominated without a primary and those candidates nominated in the  
33 primary shall be placed on the ballot. The candidate for a single office receiving the  
34 highest number of votes shall be elected. ~~Those candidates for a group of offices~~  
35 ~~receiving the highest number of votes, equal in number to the number of positions to be~~  
36 ~~filled, shall be elected.~~ If two candidates receiving the highest number of votes each  
37 received the same number of votes, the State Board of Elections shall determine the  
38 winner by lot."

39 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 163-323 reads as rewritten:

40 "**§ 163-323. Notice of candidacy.**

41 (a) Form of Notice. – Each person offering to be a candidate for election shall do  
42 so by filing a notice of candidacy with the State Board of Elections in the following  
43 form, inserting the words in parentheses when appropriate:

44 Date \_\_\_\_\_

1 I hereby file notice that I am a candidate for election to the office of  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ in the regular election to be held \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

3 Signed \_\_\_\_\_

4 (Name of Candidate)

5 Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

6 The notice of candidacy shall be either signed in the presence of the chairman or  
7 secretary of the State Board of Elections, or signed and acknowledged before an officer  
8 authorized to take acknowledgments who shall certify the notice under seal. An  
9 acknowledged and certified notice may be mailed to the State Board of Elections. In  
10 signing a notice of candidacy, the candidate shall use only the candidate's legal name  
11 and, in his discretion, any nickname by which commonly known. A candidate may also,  
12 in lieu of that candidate's first name and legal middle initial or middle name, if any, sign  
13 that candidate's nickname, provided the candidate appends to the notice of candidacy an  
14 affidavit that the candidate has been commonly known by that nickname for at least five  
15 years prior to the date of making the affidavit. The candidate shall also include with the  
16 affidavit the way the candidate's name (as permitted by law) should be listed on the  
17 ballot if another candidate with the same last name files a notice of candidacy for that  
18 office.

19 A notice of candidacy signed by an agent or any person other than the candidate  
20 himself shall be invalid.

21 (b) Time for Filing Notice of Candidacy. – Candidates seeking election to the  
22 following offices shall file their notice of candidacy with the State Board of Elections  
23 no earlier than 12:00 noon on the second Monday in February and no later than 12:00  
24 noon on the last business day in February preceding the election:

25 Justices of the Supreme Court.

26 Judges of the Court of Appeals.

27 Judges of the superior courts.

28 Judges of the district courts.

29 (c) Withdrawal of Notice of Candidacy. – Any person who has filed a notice of  
30 candidacy for an office shall have the right to withdraw it at any time prior to the date  
31 on which the right to file for that office expires under the terms of subsection (b) of this  
32 section.

33 (d) Certificate That Candidate Is Registered Voter. – Candidates shall file along  
34 with their notice a certificate signed by the chairman of the board of elections or the  
35 director of elections of the county in which they are registered to vote, stating that the  
36 person is registered to vote in that county, and if the candidacy is for superior court  
37 judge and the county contains more than one superior court district, stating the superior  
38 court district of which the person is a resident. In issuing such certificate, the chairman  
39 or director shall check the registration records of the county to verify such information.  
40 During the period commencing 36 hours immediately preceding the filing deadline, the  
41 State Board of Elections shall accept, on a conditional basis, the notice of candidacy of  
42 a candidate who has failed to secure the verification ordered herein subject to receipt of  
43 verification no later than three days following the filing deadline. The State Board of  
44 Elections shall prescribe the form for such certificate, and distribute it to each county

1 board of elections no later than the last Monday in December of each odd-numbered  
2 year.

3 (e) Candidacy for More Than One Office Prohibited. – No person may file a  
4 notice of candidacy for more than one office ~~or group of offices~~ described in subsection  
5 (b) of this section, or for an office ~~or group of offices~~ described in subsection (b) of this  
6 section and an office described in G.S. 163-106(c), for any one election. If a person has  
7 filed a notice of candidacy with a board of elections under this section or under  
8 G.S. 163-106(c) for one ~~office or group of offices~~, office, then a notice of candidacy  
9 may not later be filed for any other office ~~or group of offices~~ under this section when  
10 the election is on the same date unless the notice of candidacy for the first office is  
11 withdrawn under subsection (c) of this section.

12 (f) Notice of Candidacy ~~for Certain Offices~~ to Indicate Vacancy. – In any  
13 election in which there are two or more vacancies for the office of justice of the  
14 Supreme Court, judge of the Court of Appeals, superior court judge, or district court  
15 judge to be filled by nominations, each candidate shall, at the time of filing notice of  
16 candidacy, file with the State Board of Elections a written statement designating the  
17 vacancy to which the candidate seeks election. Votes cast for a candidate shall be  
18 effective only for election to the vacancy for which the candidate has given notice of  
19 candidacy as provided in this subsection.

20 A person seeking election for a specialized district judgeship established under  
21 G.S. 7A-147 shall, at the time of filing notice of candidacy, file with the State Board of  
22 Elections a written statement designating the specialized judgeship to which the person  
23 seeks nomination.

24 (g) No person may file a notice of candidacy for superior court judge unless that  
25 person is at the time of filing the notice of candidacy a resident of the judicial district as  
26 it will exist at the time the person would take office if elected. No person may be  
27 nominated as a superior court judge under G.S. 163-114 unless that person is at the time  
28 of nomination a resident of the judicial district as it will exist at the time the person  
29 would take office if elected. This subsection implements Article IV, Section 9(1) of the  
30 North Carolina Constitution which requires regular Superior Court Judges to reside in  
31 the district for which elected."

32 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 163-327.1 reads as rewritten:

33 **"§ 163-327.1. Rules when vacancies for superior court judge are to be voted on.**

34 If a vacancy occurs in a judicial district for any offices of superior court judge, and  
35 on account of the occurrence of such vacancy, there is to be an election for one or more  
36 terms in that district to fill the vacancy or vacancies, at that same election in accordance  
37 with G.S. 163-9 and Article IV, Section 19 of the North Carolina Constitution, the  
38 nomination and election shall be determined by the following special rules in addition to  
39 any other provisions of law:

- 40 (1) If the vacancy occurs prior to the opening of the filing period under  
41 G.S. 163-323(b), nominations shall be made by primary election as  
42 provided by this ~~Article~~, ~~without designation as to the vacancy~~.  
43 Article.

1 (2) If the vacancy occurs beginning on opening of the filing period under  
2 G.S. 163-323(b), and ending on the sixtieth day before the general  
3 election, candidate filing shall be as provided by ~~G.S. 163-329 without~~  
4 ~~designation as to the vacancy, by G.S. 163-329.~~

5 (3) The general election ballot shall ~~contain, without designation as to~~  
6 ~~vacancy, contain~~ spaces for the election to fill the vacancy where  
7 nominations were made or candidates filed under subdivision (1) or (2)  
8 of this section. Except as provided in G.S. 163-329, the ~~persons~~ person  
9 receiving the highest ~~numbers~~ number of votes for each seat equal to  
10 ~~the term or terms to be filled~~ shall be elected to the term or terms."

11 **SECTION 5.** G.S. 163-328 reads as rewritten:

12 **"§ 163-328. Failure of candidates to file; death or other disqualification of a**  
13 **candidate; no withdrawal from candidacy.**

14 (a) Insufficient Number of Candidates. – If when the filing period expires,  
15 candidates have not filed for an office to be filled under this Article, the State Board of  
16 Elections shall extend the filing period for five days for any such offices.

17 (a1) Death or Disqualification of Candidate Before Primary. – If a candidate for  
18 nomination in a primary dies or becomes disqualified before the primary but after the  
19 ballots have been printed, the State Board of Elections shall determine whether or not  
20 there is time to reprint the ballots. If the Board determines that there is not enough time  
21 to reprint the ballots, the deceased or disqualified candidate's name shall remain on the  
22 ballots. If that candidate receives enough votes for nomination, such votes shall be  
23 disregarded and the candidate receiving the next highest number of votes below the  
24 number necessary for nomination shall be declared nominated. If the death or  
25 disqualification of the candidate leaves only two candidates for each office to be filled,  
26 the nonpartisan primary shall not be held and all candidates shall be declared nominees.

27 (b) Earlier Non-Primary Vacancies; Reopening Filing. – If there is no primary  
28 because only one or two candidates have filed for a single office, ~~or the number of~~  
29 ~~candidates filed for a group of offices does not exceed twice the number of positions to~~  
30 ~~be filled,~~ or if a primary has occurred and eliminated candidates, and thereafter a  
31 remaining candidate dies or otherwise becomes disqualified before the election and  
32 before the ballots are printed, the State Board of Elections shall, upon notification of the  
33 death or other disqualification, immediately reopen the filing period for an additional  
34 five days during which time additional candidates shall be permitted to file for election.  
35 If the ballots have been printed at the time the State Board of Elections receives notice  
36 of the candidate's death or other disqualification, the Board shall determine whether  
37 there will be sufficient time to reprint them before the election if the filing period is  
38 reopened for three days. If the Board determines that there will be sufficient time to  
39 reprint the ballots, it shall reopen the filing period for three days to allow other  
40 candidates to file for election, and that election shall be conducted as provided in  
41 G.S. 163-329(b1).

42 (c) Later Vacancies; Ballots Not Reprinted. – If the ballots have been printed at  
43 the time the State Board of Elections receives notice of a candidate's death or other  
44 disqualification, and if the Board determines that there is not enough time to reprint the

1 ballots before the election if the filing period is reopened for three days, then regardless  
2 of the number of candidates remaining for the office or group of offices, the ballots shall  
3 not be reprinted and the name of the vacated candidate shall remain on the ballots. If a  
4 vacated candidate should poll the highest number of votes in the election for a single  
5 ~~office or enough votes to be elected to one of a group of offices, office,~~ the State Board  
6 of Elections shall declare the office vacant and it shall be filled in the manner provided  
7 by law.

8 (d) No Withdrawal Permitted of Living, Qualified Candidate After Close of  
9 Filing. – After the close of the candidate filing period, a candidate who has filed a notice  
10 of candidacy for the office, who has not withdrawn notice before the close of filing as  
11 permitted by G.S. 163-323(b), who remains alive, and has not become disqualified for  
12 the office may not withdraw his or her candidacy. That candidate's name shall remain  
13 on the ballot, any votes cast for the candidacy shall be counted in primary or election,  
14 and if the candidate wins, the candidate may fail to qualify by refusing to take the oath  
15 of office.

16 (e) Death, Disqualification, or Failure to Qualify After Election. – If a person  
17 elected to the office of justice of the Supreme Court, judge of the Court of Appeals, or  
18 superior or district court judge dies or becomes disqualified on or after election day and  
19 before he has qualified by taking the oath of office, or fails to qualify by refusing to take  
20 the oath of office, the office shall be deemed vacant and shall be filled as provided by  
21 law."

22 **SECTION 6.** G.S. 163-329(b1) reads as rewritten:

23 "(b1) Method for Vacancy Election. – If a vacancy for the office of justice of the  
24 Supreme Court, judge of the Court of Appeals, or judge of the superior court occurs  
25 more than 60 days before the general election and after the opening of the filing period  
26 for the primary, then the State Board of Elections shall designate a special filing period  
27 of one week for candidates for the office. If more than two candidates file and qualify  
28 for the office in accordance with G.S. 163-323, then the Board shall conduct the  
29 election for the office as follows:

- 30 (1) When the vacancy described in this section occurs more than 63 days  
31 before the date of the second primary for members of the General  
32 Assembly, a special primary shall be held on the same day as the  
33 second primary. The two candidates with the most votes in the special  
34 primary shall have their names placed on the ballot for the general  
35 election held on the same day as the general election for members of  
36 the General Assembly.
- 37 (2) When the vacancy described in this section occurs less than 64 days  
38 before the date of the second primary, a general election for all the  
39 candidates shall be held on the same day as the general election for  
40 members of the General Assembly and the "instant runoff voting"  
41 method shall be used to determine the winner. Under "instant runoff  
42 voting," voters rank up to three of the candidates by order of  
43 preference, first, second, or third. If the candidate with the greatest  
44 number of first-choice votes receives more than fifty percent (50%) of

1 the first-choice votes, that candidate wins. If no candidate receives that  
2 minimum number, the two candidates with the greatest number of  
3 first-choice votes advance to a second round of counting. In this round,  
4 each ballot counts as a vote for whichever of the two final candidates  
5 is ranked highest by the voter. The candidate with the most votes in the  
6 second round wins the election. ~~If more than one seat is to be filled in  
7 the same race, the voter votes the same way as if one seat were to be  
8 filled. The counting is the same as when one seat is to be filled, with  
9 one or two rounds as needed, except that counting is done separately  
10 for each seat to be filled. The first count results in the first winner.  
11 Then the second count proceeds without the name of the first winner.  
12 This process results in the second winner. For each additional seat to  
13 be filled, an additional count is done without the names of the  
14 candidates who have already won. In multi-seat contests, the State  
15 Board of Elections may give the voter more than three choices.~~

- 16 (3) If two or more candidates receiving the highest number of votes each  
17 receive the same number of votes, the board of elections shall resolve  
18 the tie in accordance with G.S. 163-182.8."

19 **SECTION 7.** This act is effective when it becomes law.