

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE BILL 958
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Committee Substitute #4 Favorable 6/24/26
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Short Title: Election Law Changes.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

April 14, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO MAKE VARIOUS CHANGES TO THE ELECTION LAWS.
The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

PART I. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

SUSPENSION AND TRAINING OF PRECINCT OFFICIALS

SECTION 1.1.(a) Article 5 of Chapter 163 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 163-41.3. Suspension or removal of precinct officials; vacancies."

SECTION 1.1.(b) G.S. 163-33(2) reads as rewritten:

"(2) To appoint all chief judges, judges, assistants, and other officers of elections, and designate the precinct in which each shall serve; and, after notice and hearing, to suspend or remove any chief judge, judge of elections, assistant, or other officer of election appointed by it for incompetency, failure to discharge the duties of office, failure to qualify within the time prescribed by law, fraud, or for any other satisfactory ~~cause~~—cause, as provided in G.S. 163-41.3. In exercising the powers and duties of this subdivision, the board may act only when a majority of its members are present at any meeting at which such powers or duties are exercised."

SECTION 1.1.(c) G.S. 163-41(d) is recodified as G.S. 163-41.3.

SECTION 1.1.(d) G.S. 163-41, as amended by this section, reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-41. Precinct chief judges and judges of election; appointment; terms of office; qualifications; ~~vacancies~~; oaths of office.

(a) Appointment of Chief Judge and Judges. – At the meeting required by G.S. 163-31 to be held on the Tuesday following the third Monday in August of the year in which they are appointed, the county board ~~of elections~~ shall appoint one person to act as chief judge and two other persons to act as judges of election for each precinct in the county. Their terms of office shall continue for two years from the specified date of appointment and until their successors are appointed and qualified, except that if a nonresident of the precinct is appointed as chief judge or judge for a precinct, that person's term of office shall end if the county board ~~of elections~~



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1 appoints a qualified resident of the precinct of the same party to replace the nonresident chief
2 judge or judge. It shall be ~~their~~ the duty of the precinct officials to conduct the primaries and
3 elections within their respective precincts. Persons appointed to these offices must be registered
4 voters and residents of the county in which the precinct is located, of good repute, and able to
5 read and write. Not more than one judge in each precinct shall belong to the same political party
6 as the chief judge.

7 (b) ~~The As used in this Article, the~~ term "precinct official" shall mean chief judges and
8 judges appointed pursuant to this section, and all assistants appointed pursuant to G.S. 163-42,
9 unless the context of a statute clearly indicates a more restrictive meaning.

10 (b1) No person shall be eligible to serve as a precinct official, ~~as that term is defined above,~~
11 ~~who holds~~ official if any of the following apply:

12 (1) The person holds any elective office under the government of the United
13 States, or of the State of North Carolina or any political subdivision thereof.

14 ~~No person shall be eligible to serve as a precinct official who is~~

15 (2) The person is a candidate for nomination or election. ~~No person shall be~~
16 ~~eligible to serve as a precinct official who holds~~

17 (3) The person holds any office in a state, congressional district, county, or
18 precinct political party or political organization, or ~~who~~ is a manager or
19 treasurer for any candidate or political party, provided however that the
20 position of delegate to a political party convention shall not be considered an
21 office for the purpose of this ~~subsection~~ subdivision.

22 (4) The person has been prohibited from serving as a precinct official in any
23 subsequent election in accordance with G.S. 163-41.3(a).

24"

25 **SECTION 1.1.(e)** G.S. 163-41.3, as enacted by this section, reads as rewritten:

26 "**§ 163-41.3. Suspension or removal of precinct officials; vacancies.**

27 (a) Any precinct official may be suspended or removed, including on the day of the
28 election or primary, for incompetency or failure to discharge the duties of office by the county
29 board in accordance with G.S. 163-33. The county board may prohibit a precinct official who
30 has been suspended or removed from serving as a precinct official in any subsequent election.

31 (b)

32"

33 **SECTION 1.1.(f)** G.S. 163-42(c) reads as rewritten:

34 "(c) In addition, a county board ~~of elections~~ by unanimous vote of all of its members may
35 appoint any registered voter in the county as an emergency election-day assistant, as long as that
36 voter is otherwise qualified to be a precinct official. The State Board ~~of Elections~~ shall determine
37 for each election the number of emergency election-day assistants each county may have, based
38 on population, expected turnout, and complexity of election ~~duties~~ duties; however, each county
39 must have, at a minimum, four emergency election-day assistants. The county board by
40 unanimous vote of all of its members may assign emergency election-day assistants on the day
41 of the election to any precinct in the county where the number of precinct officials is insufficient
42 because of an ~~emergency occurring within 48 hours of the opening of the polls~~ emergency, the
43 suspension or removal of a precinct official, or any other reason that prevents an appointed a
44 precinct official from serving ~~serving throughout the day of the primary or election.~~ A person
45 appointed to serve as an emergency election-day assistant shall be trained and paid like other
46 precinct assistants in accordance with G.S. 163-46. A county board ~~of elections~~ shall apportion
47 the appointments ~~as of~~ emergency election-day assistant ~~assistants~~ among registrants of each
48 political party so as to make possible the staffing of each precinct with officials of more than one
49 party, and the county board shall make assignments so that no precinct has precinct ~~officials~~
50 assistants all of whom are registered with the same party."

51 **SECTION 1.1.(g)** G.S. 163-82.24 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-82.24. Statewide training and certification for election officials.

(a) ~~Training.~~—The State Board of Elections shall conduct training programs in election law and procedures ~~in accordance with this section.~~

(a1) Every county elections director shall receive training conducted by the State Board at least as often as required in the following schedule:

(1) Once during each odd-numbered year before the municipal election held in the ~~county;~~ county.

(2) Once during each even-numbered year before the first partisan ~~primary;~~ and primary.

(3) Once during each even-numbered year after the partisan primaries but before the general election.

(a2) Every member of a county board ~~of elections~~ shall receive training conducted by the State Board at least once during the six months after the member's initial appointment and at least once again during the first two years of the member's service. If an election occurs prior to the county board member's training, the State Board shall make available training materials for use by that county board member until the training required by this subsection is completed.

(a3) The State Board ~~of Elections~~ shall ~~promulgate~~ adopt rules for the training of precinct officials, which shall be followed by the county ~~boards of elections;~~ boards. At a minimum, the training for all precinct officials shall include information regarding all of the following:

(1) The duties of the office of precinct official.

(2) How to confirm whether a person presenting to vote is registered in that county.

(3) How to issue ballots.

(4) How to properly provide voter assistance, including how to provide assistance to those curbside voting.

(5) The procedure for opening and closing of polls.

(6) The prohibition regarding election-related activity in the voting place and buffer zone of the voting place.

(7) The potential for suspension or removal from office for failure to comply with the provisions of this Chapter.

(b) ~~Certification.~~—The State Board ~~of Elections~~ shall conduct a program for certification of election officials. The program shall include training in election law and procedures. Before issuing certification to an election official, the State Board shall administer an examination designed to determine the proficiency of the official in election law and procedures. The State Board shall set adequate standards for the passage of the examination."

SECTION 1.1.(h) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to elections held on or after that date.

APPOINTMENT OF OBSERVERS IN NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS

SECTION 1.2.(a) G.S. 163-45.1(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Observers may be appointed in accordance with the following:

(1) The chair of each political party in the county may designate two registered voters of the county to serve as observers at each voting place in that county in which the political party has a candidate appearing on the ballot.

(2) The chair of each political party in the county may designate up to 10 registered voters of the county to serve as observers at any voting place in the county in which the political party has a candidate appearing on the ballot.

(3) The chair of each political party in the State may designate up to 100 registered voters of the State to serve as observers at any voting place in the State in which the political party has a candidate appearing on the ballot.

(4) An unaffiliated candidate or the unaffiliated candidate's campaign manager may designate up to two observers-registered voters to serve as observers at each voting place in which that unaffiliated candidate appears on the ballot.

(5) A nonpartisan candidate in a municipal election, special district election, or board of education election or the nonpartisan candidate's campaign manager may designate up to one registered voter to serve as an observer at each voting place in which that nonpartisan candidate appears on the ballot."

SECTION 1.2.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to elections held on or after that date.

CHANGE DATE FOR WHEN CERTAIN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS HELD

SECTION 1.3.(a) G.S. 163-279(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) Primaries and elections for offices filled by election of the people in cities, towns, incorporated villages, and special districts shall be held in 1973 and every two or four years thereafter as provided by municipal charter on the following days:

(1) If the election is nonpartisan and decided by simple plurality, the election shall be held on Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

(2) If the election is partisan, the election shall be held on Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the first primary shall be held on the second Tuesday after Labor Day, and the second primary, if required, shall be held on the fourth Tuesday before the election.

(3) If the election is nonpartisan and the nonpartisan primary method of election is used, the election shall be held on Tuesday after the first Monday in November and the nonpartisan primary shall be held on the ~~fourth Tuesday before the election~~second Tuesday after Labor Day.

(4) If the election is nonpartisan and the election and runoff election method of election is used, the election shall be held on the ~~fourth Tuesday before the Tuesday after the first Monday in November~~second Tuesday after Labor Day, and the runoff election, if required, shall be held on Tuesday after the first Monday in November."

SECTION 1.3.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to elections held on or after that date.

POLITICAL PARTY PRIMARY CANDIDATE ELIGIBILITY

SECTION 1.4.(a) G.S. 163-106.1 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-106.1. Eligibility to file.

(a) No person shall be permitted to file as a candidate in a party primary unless that person has been affiliated with that party for at least ~~90-365~~ days as of the date of that person filing such notice of candidacy. A person registered as "unaffiliated" shall be ineligible to file as a candidate in a party primary election.

(b) Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, a person who has been affiliated with a party for less than 365 days may file as a candidate in that party's primary if the State executive committee of the party with which the candidate is affiliated grants the person a waiver. The State executive committee of the party may, in its sole discretion, grant or deny a waiver request. The waiver must be submitted to the board of elections which has jurisdiction over the ballot item under G.S. 163-182.4 by the close of the filing period for that office.

(c) This section shall not apply to any of the following:

(1) Candidates selected by party convention or party caucus.

(2) Parties that have been recognized under Article 9 of this Chapter for two continuous years or less."

1 **SECTION 1.4.(b)** This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to
2 candidates filing in a party primary on or after that date.

3
4 **REQUIRE USE OF FEDERAL DECENNIAL CENSUS DATA WHEN ESTABLISHING**
5 **DISTRICT BOUNDARIES**

6 **SECTION 1.5.(a)** G.S. 153A-22 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:
7 "(h) In establishing district boundaries, the board of commissioners shall use data derived
8 from the most recent federal decennial census and shall not use any other population estimates."

9 **SECTION 1.5.(b)** G.S. 160A-23 reads as rewritten:

10 **"§ 160A-23. District map; reapportionment.**

11 (a) If the city is divided into electoral districts for the purpose of electing the members of
12 the council, the map or description required by G.S. 160A-22 shall also show the boundaries of
13 the several districts.

14 (b) The council shall have authority to revise electoral district boundaries from time to
15 time. If district boundaries are set out in the city charter and the charter does not provide a method
16 for revising them, the council may revise them only for the purpose of (i) accounting for territory
17 annexed to or excluded from the city, and (ii) correcting population imbalances among the
18 districts shown by a new federal decennial census or caused by exclusions or annexations. When
19 district boundaries have been established in conformity with the federal Constitution, the council
20 shall not be required to revise them again until a new federal decennial census of population is
21 taken or territory is annexed to or excluded from the city, whichever event first occurs.

22 (c) In establishing district boundaries, the council ~~may~~ shall use data derived from the
23 most recent federal decennial census and shall not ~~be required to~~ use any other population
24 estimates."

25 **SECTION 1.5.(c)** G.S. 115C-37(i) reads as rewritten:

26 "(i) The local board of education shall revise electoral district boundaries from time to
27 time as provided by this subsection. If district boundaries are set by local act or court order and
28 the act or order does not provide a method for revising them, the local board of education shall
29 revise them only for the purpose of (i) accounting for territory annexed to or excluded from the
30 school administrative unit, and (ii) correcting population imbalances among the districts shown
31 by a new federal decennial census or caused by exclusions or annexations. After the General
32 Assembly has ratified an act establishing district boundaries, the local board of education shall
33 not revise them again until a new federal decennial census of population is taken or territory is
34 annexed to or excluded from the school administrative unit, whichever event first occurs. After
35 the local board of education has revised district boundaries in conformity with this ~~act,~~
36 subsection, the local board of education shall not revise them again until a new federal decennial
37 census of population is taken or territory is annexed to or excluded from the school administrative
38 unit, whichever event occurs first, except that the board may make an earlier revision of district
39 boundaries it has drawn if it must do so to comply with a court order or to gain approval of a
40 district-revision plan by the U.S. Justice Department under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.
41 In establishing district boundaries, the local board of education shall use data derived from the
42 most recent federal ~~census.~~ decennial census and shall not use any other population estimates."

43 **SECTION 1.5.(d)** This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to
44 the establishment of district boundaries by a county, city, or local board of education on or after
45 that date.

46
47 **PART II. REGISTRATION OF VOTERS**

48 **SECTION 2.1.(a)** G.S. 20-7(b2) is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

49 "(9) To the State Board of Elections for the purpose of voter registration and list
50 maintenance on a routine schedule of no later than the fifteenth day of each
51 month."

1 **SECTION 2.1.(b)** This section becomes effective January 1, 2027.

2 **SECTION 2.2.(a)** G.S. 163-82.7 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

3 "(a1) Distribution to County Boards. – If the State Board receives a voter registration
4 application, the State Board shall forward the application to the appropriate county board in a
5 timely manner. If the application is received by the State Board within the 100 days prior to an
6 election, the State Board shall forward the application to the appropriate county board within five
7 business days of receipt."

8 **SECTION 2.2.(b)** This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to
9 voter registration applications received by the State Board of Elections on or after that date.

10 **SECTION 2.3.(a)** G.S. 163-82.14 reads as rewritten:

11 **"§ 163-82.14. List maintenance.**

12 ...

13 (a1) Methods of List Maintenance; Cross State Checks. – List maintenance efforts under
14 this section shall be nondiscriminatory and shall comply with the provisions of the Voting Rights
15 Act of 1965, as amended, and with the provisions of the National Voter Registration Act. The
16 State Board, in addition to the methods set forth in this section, may use other methods toward
17 the ends set forth in subsection (a) of this section, including address-updating services provided
18 by the Postal Service and entering into data sharing agreements with other states to cross-check
19 information on voter registration and voting records. Any data sharing agreement shall require
20 the other state or states to comply with G.S. 163-82.10 and G.S. 163-82.10B. Any voter
21 registration data received from other states pursuant to a data sharing agreement with that state
22 is not a public record.

23 (b) Death. – In order to remove the names of deceased persons from the list of eligible
24 voters in this State, the following shall occur:

25 (1) At a minimum of once per week, the Department of Health and Human
26 Services shall furnish free of charge to the Executive Director, in a format
27 prescribed by the State Board, the names of deceased persons who were
28 residents of the State. ~~Upon receipt of the list from the Department of Health~~
29 ~~and Human Services, the~~ On a weekly basis, the Executive Director shall
30 distribute to each county board ~~of elections~~ the names on that the list received
31 from the Department of Health and Human Services of deceased persons who
32 were residents of that county. Upon the receipt of those names, each county
33 board ~~of elections~~ shall remove from its voter registration records any person
34 the list shows to be deceased each week. The State Board shall confirm that
35 each county board has removed the names of deceased persons from the list
36 of eligible voters in this State.

37 (2) Upon receipt of a signed statement of a near relative or personal representative
38 of the estate of a deceased voter indicating that the person has died, a county
39 board ~~of elections~~ shall remove the person identified as deceased from its
40 voter registration records within one week of receipt of the signed statement.
41 The county board does not need to send any notice to the address of the person
42 before removing the person from its voter registration records.

43 (3) If the State Board requests and receives any information from a federal agency
44 pertaining to death records of registered voters in this State, the Executive
45 Director shall identify whether any person identified in the information as
46 deceased is a registered voter in this State. Within one week of receipt of the
47 information, the Executive Director shall distribute to each county board the
48 names of those persons who were residents of that county. Upon receipt of
49 those names, each county board shall remove from its voter registration
50 records any person the list shows to be deceased within one week of the receipt

of the list. The State Board shall confirm that each county board has removed the names of deceased persons from the list of eligible voters in this State.

...."

SECTION 2.3.(b) If the State Board of Elections received information regarding potential non-eligible citizens appearing on the State's voter registration records from a federal database on or after January 1, 2026, and a challenge has not been entered against a voter appearing on the information from the federal database and the voter has not otherwise been removed from the list of eligible voters in the State, then the State Board of Elections shall create a process for removing such voters from the State's voter registration records.

SECTION 2.3.(c) Subsection (a) of this section becomes effective January 1, 2027.

SECTION 2.4.(a) G.S. 163-82.19(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) Voter Registration at Drivers License Offices. – The Division of Motor Vehicles shall, pursuant to the rules adopted by the State ~~Board of Elections, Board,~~ modify its forms so that any eligible person who applies for original issuance, renewal or correction of a drivers license, or special identification card issued under G.S. 20-37.7 may, on a part of the form, complete an application to register to vote, or to update the voter's registration if the voter has changed his or her address or moved from one precinct to another or from one county to another. The person taking the application shall ask if the applicant is a citizen of the United States. If the applicant states that the applicant is not a citizen of the United States, or declines to answer the question, the person taking the application shall inform the applicant that it is a felony for a person who is not a citizen of the United States to apply to register to vote. The application shall state in clear language the penalty for violation of this section. The person taking an application to register to vote or to update the voter's registration shall proceed with the application only if the applicant affirmatively states that the applicant is a citizen of the United States. The necessary forms shall be prescribed by the State ~~Board of Elections, Board.~~ The form must ask for the previous voter registration address of the voter, if any. If a previous address is listed, and it is not in the county of residence of the applicant, the appropriate county board ~~of elections~~ shall treat the application as an authorization to cancel the previous registration and also process it as such under the procedures of G.S. 163-82.9. If a previous address is listed and that address is in the county where the voter applies to register, the application shall be processed as if it had been submitted under G.S. 163-82.9.

(a1) Timely Registration at Drivers License Offices. – Registration shall become effective as provided in G.S. 163-82.7. Applications to register to vote accepted at a drivers license office under this section until the deadline established in G.S. 163-82.6(d)(2) shall be treated as timely made for an election, and no person who completes an application at that drivers license office shall be denied the vote in that election for failure to apply earlier than that deadline.

(a2) Forwarding Voter Registrations at Drivers License Offices. – All applications shall be forwarded by the Department of Transportation to the appropriate county board of elections not later than five business days after the date of acceptance, according to rules which shall be promulgated by the State ~~Board of Elections, Board.~~ Those rules shall provide for a paperless, instant, electronic transfer of applications to the appropriate ~~board of elections, county board.~~

SECTION 2.4.(b) G.S. 163-82.20(e) reads as rewritten:

"(e) Prohibitions. – Any person providing any service under subsection (b) of this section shall ~~not~~ not do any of the following:

- (1) Seek to influence an applicant's political preference or party registration, except that this shall not be construed to prevent the notice provided by G.S. 163-82.4(d) to be given if the applicant refuses to declare his party ~~affiliation; affiliation.~~
- (2) Display any such political preference or party ~~allegiance; allegiance.~~
- (3) Make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to discourage the applicant from registering to ~~vote; or vote.~~

(4) Make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to lead the applicant to believe that a decision to register or not to register has any bearing on the availability of services or benefits.

(5) Proceed with any voter registration application if the applicant does not affirmatively indicate the applicant is a citizen of the United States."

SECTION 2.4.(c) Article 7A of Chapter 163 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 163-83. Requirement for citizenship on voter registration applications.

(a) When making the tentative determination of qualification in accordance with G.S. 163-82.7(a), the county board shall process the voter registration application in accordance with this Article only if the voter registration application affirmatively indicates that the applicant is a citizen of the United States.

(b) If a county board receives a voter registration application in which no answer is indicated as to the question of whether the applicant is a citizen of the United States, then the county board shall send a notice to the applicant that the voter registration application must indicate whether the applicant is a citizen of the United States in order to be processed, and the applicant must provide a statement under penalty of perjury concerning citizenship. The notice sent from the county board shall include a form for the applicant to fill out answering the question of whether the applicant is a citizen of the United States and shall indicate that the form must be mailed or hand-delivered to the county board within 30 days from the date the notice was sent in order for the applicant's voter registration application to be processed. If the form is received by the county board within 30 days from the date the notice was mailed, the county board shall proceed with the voter registration application accordingly. If the form is not received by the county board within 30 days from the date the notice was mailed, the county board shall not approve the voter registration application, shall not add the individual to the list of registered voters of the State, and shall notify the voter of the denial in accordance with G.S. 163-82.7(b)."

SECTION 2.4.(d) G.S. 163-82.18(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) Right to Appeal. – Any applicant who receives notice of denial of registration pursuant to G.S. 163-82.7 or G.S. 163-83 may appeal the denial within five days after receipt of the notice of denial. The county board ~~of elections~~ shall promptly set a date for a public hearing. The notice of appeal shall be in writing and shall be signed by the appealing party, shall include the appealing party's name, date of birth, address, and reasons for the appeal."

SECTION 2.4.(e) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to voter registration applications processed on or after that date.

PART III. CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

EARLY VOTING PERIOD

SECTION 3.1.(a) G.S. 163-166.40(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Each county board shall conduct early voting in accordance with the following:

(1) Not earlier than the third Thursday before ~~an~~ the general election in which a voter seeks to vote and not later than 3:00 P.M. on the last Saturday before that general election, the voter may appear in person only at the office of the county board ~~of elections~~, board, except as provided in G.S. 163-166.35. A county board ~~of elections~~ shall conduct early voting on the last Saturday before the general election from 8:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M.

(2) Not earlier than the second Thursday before a primary election, a second primary, or a runoff election in which a voter seeks to vote, and not later than 3:00 P.M. on the last Saturday before that primary, second primary, or runoff election, the voter may appear in person only at the office of the county board, except as provided in G.S. 163-166.35. A county board shall conduct early

voting on the last Saturday before a primary, a second primary, or a runoff election from 8:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M."

SECTION 3.1.(b) G.S. 163-13(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Nominating Procedures. – If a congressional vacancy occurs beginning on the tenth day before the filing period ends under G.S. 163-106(c) preceding the next succeeding general election, candidates for the special election to fill the vacancy shall not be nominated in primaries. Instead, nominations may be made by the political party congressional district executive committees in the district in which the vacancy occurs. The ~~chairman~~ chair and secretary of each political party congressional district executive committee nominating a candidate shall immediately certify his or her name and party affiliation to the State Board so that it may be printed on the special election ballots.

If the congressional vacancy occurs before the tenth day before the filing period ends under G.S. 163-106(c) prior to the next succeeding general election, the Governor shall call a special primary for the purpose of nominating candidates to be voted on in a special election called by the Governor in accordance with the provisions of subsection (a) of this section. Such a primary election shall be conducted in accordance with the general laws governing primaries, except that the opening and closing dates for filing notices of candidacy with the State Board shall be fixed by the Governor in his or her call for the special primary. The Governor may fix the early voting period for each county board to conduct early voting for the special election and for the special primary, but such period shall not be for more than 10 consecutive days. The Governor may also fix the absentee voting period for the special election and for the special first primary, but such period shall not be less than 30 days."

SECTION 3.1.(c) G.S. 163-287 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

"(a1) For any special election not held at a time specified under subsection (a) of this section, the resolution adopted by the governing body of the county, municipality, or special district may set the time period for early voting in the special election, which shall be for not more than 10 consecutive days."

SECTION 3.1.(d) G.S. 163-302(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) In any municipal election, including a primary or general election or referendum, ~~mail-in~~ absentee voting and early voting may, upon resolution of the municipal governing body, be permitted. The resolution, if adopted by the municipal governing body, may set the time period for each county board conducting the election to conduct early voting, but such period shall not be for more than 10 consecutive days. Such resolution must be adopted no later than 60 days prior to an election in order to be effective for that election. Any such resolution shall remain effective for all future elections unless repealed no later than 60 days before an election. A copy of all resolutions adopted under this section shall be filed with the State Board and the county board of elections conducting the election within 10 days of passage in order to be effective. In addition, ~~mail-in~~ absentee voting and early voting shall be allowed in any referendum on incorporation of a municipality."

SECTION 3.1.(e) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to elections held on or after that date.

BALLOT CHALLENGES

SECTION 3.2.(a) G.S. 163-89 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-89. Procedures for challenging ballots cast during early voting and absentee ballots.

(a) Time for Challenge. – ~~The absentee ballot of any voter~~ Ballots cast under Part 5 of Article 14A of this Chapter and ballots cast under Article 20 and Article 21A of this Chapter that are received by the county board of elections pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(1) may be challenged no later than 5:00 P.M. on the fifth business day after the primary or general election or county bond election. ~~The absentee ballot of any voter~~ Ballots cast under Article 20 and Article 21A of this Chapter that are received by the county board of elections pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(2)

may be challenged no later than 5:00 P.M. on the next business day following the deadline for receipt of such absentee ballots.

(b) Who May Challenge. – Any registered voter of the same county as the ~~absentee~~ challenged voter may challenge that voter's ~~absentee~~-ballot.

(c) Form and Nature of Challenge. – Each challenged ~~absentee~~-ballot shall be challenged separately. The burden of proof shall be on the challenger. Each challenge shall be made in writing and, if ~~they are~~ available, shall be made on forms prescribed by the State ~~Board of Elections~~ Board. Each challenge shall specify the reasons why the ballot does not comply with the provisions of this ~~Article~~ Chapter or why the ~~absentee-challenged~~ voter is not legally entitled to vote in the particular primary or election. The challenge shall be signed by the challenger.

(d) To Whom Challenge Addressed; to Whom Challenge Delivered. – Each challenge shall be addressed to the county ~~board of elections~~ board. It may be filed with the county board at its offices or with the chief judge of the precinct in which the ~~challenger and absentee challenged~~ voter ~~are~~ is registered. If it is delivered to the chief judge, the chief judge shall personally deliver the challenge to the ~~chairman~~ chair of the county ~~board of elections~~ on the day of the county canvass board.

(e) Hearing Procedure. – All challenges filed under this section shall be heard by the county board ~~of elections~~ on the day set for the canvass of the returns. All members of the county board shall attend the canvass and all members shall be present for the hearing of challenges to ~~absentee-challenged~~ ballots. The hearing of challenges shall be audio and video recorded.

~~Before the board hears a challenge to an absentee ballot, the chairman shall mark the word "challenged" after the voter's name in the register of absentee ballot applications and ballots issued and in the pollbook of absentee voters.~~

The county board then shall hear the challenger's reasons for the challenge, and it challenge. For challenges to ballots cast under Article 20 of this Chapter, the county board shall make its decision without opening the container-return envelope or removing the ballots from it.

The county board shall have authority to administer the necessary oaths or affirmations to all witnesses brought before it to testify to the qualifications of the voter challenged or to the validity or invalidity of the ballot.

If the challenge is sustained, ~~the chairman shall mark the word "sustained" after the word "challenged" following the voter's name in the register of absentee ballot applications and ballots issued and in the pollbook of absentee voters; the voter's ballots shall not be counted; and the container-return envelope shall not be opened but shall be marked "Challenge Sustained." All envelopes so marked shall be preserved intact by the chairman for a period of six months from canvass day or longer if any contest then is pending concerning the validity of any absentee ballot; then the challenged ballot shall be counted for any ballot items for which the challenged voter is eligible to vote, as if it were a provisional official ballot under the provisions of G.S. 163-166.11(4).~~

If the challenge is overruled, the ~~absentee~~-ballots shall be ~~removed from the container-return envelopes and counted by the board of elections~~ county board, and the county board shall adjust the appropriate abstracts of returns to show that the ballots have been counted and ~~tallied in the manner provided for unchallenged absentee ballots~~ tallied.

If the challenge was delivered to the county board by the chief judge of the precinct and was sustained, the county board shall reopen the appropriate ballot boxes, remove such ballots, determine how those ballots were voted, deduct such ballots from the returns, and adjust the appropriate abstracts of returns.

Any voter whose ballots have been challenged may, either personally or through an authorized representative, appear before the county board at the hearing on the challenge and present evidence as to the validity of the ballot.

(f) Notations on Absentee Ballots. – For ballots cast under Article 20 of this Chapter, the following shall occur during and after the hearing process:

(1) Before the county board hears the challenge, the chair shall mark the word "challenged" after the voter's name in the register of absentee ballot applications and ballots issued and in the pollbook of absentee voters.

(2) If the challenge is sustained, the chair shall mark the word "sustained" after the word "challenged" following the voter's name in the register of absentee ballot applications and ballots issued and in the pollbook of absentee voters, and the container return envelope shall not be opened but shall be marked "Challenge Sustained." All envelopes so marked shall be preserved intact by the chair for a period of six months from canvass day or longer if any contest then is pending concerning the validity of any challenged ballot."

SECTION 3.2.(b) G.S. 163-90.2 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-90.2. Action when challenge sustained, overruled, or dismissed.

(a) When any challenge is sustained for any cause listed under G.S. 163-85(c), the county board shall mark the word "sustained" after the word "challenged" in the registration records of the voter challenged as required by G.S. 163-85(b) and indicate the reason for the sustained challenge. The county board shall cancel or correct the voter registration of the voter. The county board shall maintain such record for at least six months and during the pendency of any appeal. The challenged ballot shall be counted for any ballot items for which the challenged voter is eligible to vote, as if it were a provisional official ballot under the provisions of G.S. 163-166.11(4).

(b) When any challenge made under G.S. 163-85 is overruled or dismissed, the county board shall erase the word "challenged" which appears on the person's registration records.

(c) A decision by a county board of elections on any challenge made under the provisions of this Article shall be appealable to the Superior Court of the county in which the offices of that county board are located within 10 days. If the appeal is made by the State Board, that appeal shall be to the Superior Court of the county in which the challenge originated. Only those persons against whom a challenge is sustained or persons who have made a challenge which is overruled shall have standing to file such appeal."

SECTION 3.2.(c) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to challenges filed on or after that date.

POST-ELECTION AUDITS BY STATE AUDITOR

SECTION 3.3.(a) Article 5A of Chapter 147 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 147-64.6Q. Audit of general elections.

(a) In addition to any authority granted in G.S. 147-64.7, after the certification of each general election under Chapter 163 of the General Statutes, the Auditor shall randomly select counties of the State in which to conduct post-election audits of election system and controls. The number of audits to be conducted is at the discretion of the Auditor, but all county boards of elections must be audited at least once every six years.

(b) No county audit under this section shall occur until after the election is certified pursuant to G.S. 163-182.15. Nothing in this section supersedes, overrides, or replaces any procedures in Article 15A of Chapter 163 of the General Statutes. No findings in audits under this section shall be used as grounds to challenge the final result of an election. Audits under this section are in addition to audits conducted under G.S. 163-182.12A.

(c) In conducting audits under this section, the Auditor may examine all of the following areas:

(1) The accuracy of voter rolls and compliance with list maintenance requirements in State and federal law.

- (2) Procedures for testing voting equipment before counting ballots, including the ballots used for testing the equipment and the storage and maintenance of the equipment.
- (3) Records of ballots distributed, ballots voted, poll book records, and ballots tabulated.
- (4) Chain of custody and seal documentation.
- (5) Absentee ballots, absentee ballot applications, and absentee ballot container-return envelopes to ensure appropriate processing and counting of absentee ballots.
- (6) Provisional ballots, provisional ballot envelopes, and records regarding provisional ballots.
- (7) Compliance with all State and federal laws regarding contact with voters and voter assistance.
- (8) Any areas of concern regarding election accuracy, security, or credibility uncovered over the course of the audit.

(d) Election officials of the county under audit may be present during a county audit under this section and shall preserve chain of custody of cast ballots and other documents, when applicable.

(e) The Auditor shall produce annual reports of the audits conducted under this section and make them accessible on the Office of the State Auditor's website in perpetuity. The report shall include details of which areas listed in subsection (c) of this section were examined and the Auditor's findings related to those areas. The report may include recommendations for best practices, additional training, oversight, or changes to election administration. Before submitting the report, the Auditor shall allow a board of elections for any county discussed in the report to review the report and provide comments to be submitted along with it in accordance with G.S. 147-64.6(c)(13). The reports shall not violate any applicable confidentiality laws.

(f) If the Auditor receives or collects information during an audit under this section that the Auditor believes may be evidence of a violation of State or federal law, the Auditor shall refer this evidence in accordance with G.S. 147-64.6B.

(g) If an error, inefficiency, or vulnerability in a county's election system or controls is uncovered in an audit under this section, the county board of elections shall submit a report to the Auditor, the State Board of Elections, and the county board of commissioners outlining its plan to fix the error, inefficiency, or vulnerability.

(h) The Auditor, in collaboration with the State Board of Elections, shall develop an audit manual that details the policies and procedures guiding audits under this section. This manual shall not have the force of law. The manual shall not be altered within the 90 days preceding an election in which the manual is utilized to conduct an audit under this section."

SECTION 3.3.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027.

PART IV. CAMPAIGN FINANCE REVISIONS

INCREASE THRESHOLD FOR NONCASH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SECTION 4.1.(a) G.S. 163-278.8(d) reads as rewritten:

"(d) All expenditures for nonmedia expenses (except postage) of more than ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) shall be made by a verifiable form of payment. The State Board of Elections shall prescribe methods to ensure an audit trail for every expenditure so that the identity of each payee can be determined. All expenditures for nonmedia expenses of ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) or less may be made by check or by cash payment. All nonmedia expenditures of more than ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) shall be accounted for and reported individually and separately with a specific description to provide a reasonable understanding of the expenditure, but expenditures of ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~

one hundred dollars (\$100.00) or less may be accounted for and reported in an aggregated amount, but in that case the treasurer shall account for and report that the treasurer made expenditures of ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) or less each, the amounts, dates, and the purposes for which made. In the case of a nonmedia expenditure required to be accounted for individually and separately with a specific description to provide a reasonable understanding of the expenditure by this subsection, if the expenditure was to an individual, the report shall list the name and address of the individual."

SECTION 4.1.(b) G.S. 163-278.11(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Threshold for Reporting Identity of Contributor. – A treasurer shall not be required to report the name, address, or principal occupation of any individual who contributes ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) or less to the treasurer's committee during an election as defined in G.S. 163-278.13. The State Board of Elections shall provide on its reporting forms for the reporting of contributions below that threshold. On those reporting forms, the State Board may require date and amount of contributions below the threshold, but may treat differently for reporting purposes contributions below the threshold that are made in different modes and in different settings."

SECTION 4.1.(c) G.S. 163-278.14(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) No entity shall make, and no candidate, committee or treasurer shall accept, any monetary contribution in excess of ~~fifty dollars (\$50.00)~~ one hundred dollars (\$100.00) unless such contribution is in the form of a check, draft, money order, credit card charge, debit, or other noncash method that can be subject to written verification. No contribution in the form of check, draft, money order, credit card charge, debits, or other noncash method may be made or accepted unless it contains a specific designation of the intended contributee chosen by the contributor. The State Board may prescribe guidelines as to the reporting and verification of any method of contribution payment allowed under this Article. For contributions by money order, the State Board of Elections shall prescribe methods to ensure an audit trail for every contribution so that the identity of the contributor can be determined. For a contribution made by credit card, the credit card account number of a contributor is not a public record."

SECTION 4.1.(d) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to monetary contributions and expenditures made, reported, or accepted on or after that date.

INCREASE THRESHOLD FOR ESTABLISHING CERTAIN CANDIDATE CAMPAIGN COMMITTEES

SECTION 4.2.(a) G.S. 163-278.10A reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-278.10A. Threshold of \$1,000-\$5,000 for financial reports for certain candidates.

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Chapter, a candidate for a county office, municipal office, local school board office, soil and water conservation district board of supervisors, or sanitary district board shall be exempted from the reports of contributions, loans, and expenditures required in G.S. 163-278.9(a), 163-278.40B, 163-278.40C, 163-278.40D, and 163-278.40E if to further the candidate's campaign that ~~candidate~~ candidate complies with all of the following:

- (1) Does not receive more than ~~one thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ five thousand dollars (\$5,000) in ~~contributions, and~~ contributions.
- (2) Does not receive more than ~~one thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ five thousand dollars (\$5,000) in ~~loans, and~~ loans.
- (3) Does not spend more than ~~one thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ five thousand dollars (\$5,000).

To qualify for the exemption from those reports, the candidate's treasurer shall file a certification that the candidate does not intend to receive in contributions or loans or expend more than ~~one thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ five thousand dollars (\$5,000) to further the candidate's campaign. The certification shall be filed with the Board at the same time the candidate files the candidate's

Organizational Report as required in G.S. 163-278.7, G.S. 163-278.9, and G.S. 163-278.40A. If the candidate's campaign is being conducted by a political committee which is handling all contributions, loans, and expenditures for the candidate's campaign, the treasurer of the political committee shall file a certification of intent to stay within the threshold amount. If the intent to stay within the threshold changes, or if the ~~one-thousand-dollar (\$1,000)-five-thousand-dollar (\$5,000)~~ threshold is exceeded, the treasurer shall immediately notify the Board and shall be responsible for filing all reports required in G.S. 163-278.9 and 163-278.40B, 163-278.40C, 163-278.40D, and 163-278.40E; provided that any contribution, loan, or expenditure which would have been required to be reported on an earlier report but for this section shall be included on the next report required after the intent changes or the threshold is exceeded.

...."

SECTION 4.2.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to certifications for report exemptions filed on or after that date.

INCREASE THRESHOLD FOR REPORTING OF INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES

SECTION 4.3.(a) G.S. 163-278.12 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-278.12. Special reporting of contributions and independent expenditures.

(a) Subject to G.S. 163-278.39 and G.S. 163-278.14, individuals and other entities not otherwise prohibited from doing so may make independent expenditures. In the event an individual, person, or other entity making independent expenditures but not otherwise required to report them makes independent expenditures in excess of one ~~hundred dollars (\$100.00),~~ thousand dollars (\$1,000), that individual, person, or entity shall file a statement of such independent expenditure with the appropriate board of elections in the manner prescribed by the State ~~Board of Elections.~~Board.

(b) Any person or entity other than an individual that is permitted to make contributions but is not otherwise required to report them shall report each contribution in excess of one ~~hundred dollars (\$100.00)-thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ with the appropriate board of elections in the manner prescribed by the State ~~Board of Elections.~~Board.

(c) In assuring compliance with subsections (a) and (b) of this section, the State Board of Elections shall require the identification of each person or entity making a donation of more than one ~~hundred dollars (\$100.00)-thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ to the entity filing the report if the donation was made to further the reported independent expenditure or contribution. If the donor is an individual, the statement shall also contain the principal occupation of the donor. The "principal occupation of the donor" shall mean the same as the "principal occupation of the contributor" in G.S. 163-278.11.

(d) Contributions or independent expenditures required to be reported under this section shall be reported within 30 days after they exceed one ~~hundred dollars (\$100.00)-thousand dollars (\$1,000)~~ or 10 days before an election the contributions or independent expenditures affect, whichever occurs earlier.

...."

SECTION 4.3.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to independent expenditures made on or after that date.

INCREASE THRESHOLD FOR FILING 48-HOUR REPORTS

SECTION 4.4.(a) G.S. 163-278.9 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-278.9. Statements filed with Board.

(a) Except as provided in G.S. 163-278.10A, the treasurer of each candidate and of each political committee shall file with the Board under certification of the treasurer as true and correct to the best of the knowledge of that officer the following reports:

...

(2) 48-Hour Report. – A political committee, political party or affiliated party committee that receives a contribution or transfer of funds shall disclose within 48 hours of receipt a contribution or transfer of ~~one-two~~ thousand dollars ~~(\$1,000)-(\$2,000)~~ or more received before an election but after the period covered by the last report due before that election. The disclosure shall be by report to the State Board identifying the source and amount of the funds. The State Board shall specify the form and manner of making the report, including the reporting of in-kind contributions. The State Board shall increase the dollar amount of the reporting threshold effective each election cycle beginning on the period from January 1 of an odd-numbered year through December 31 of the next even-numbered year based on the Consumer Price Index as provided in G.S. 163-278.13(b). The State Board shall set the revised threshold in October of the even-numbered year, publish the revised threshold in the North Carolina Register, and notify the Revisor of Statutes who shall adjust the dollar amount in this subdivision.

...

(a1) Subdivision (a)(2) of this section shall not apply to any candidate campaign committee, as defined by G.S. 163-278.38Z, in a primary election in which the candidate is unopposed on that ballot.

...."

SECTION 4.4.(b) G.S. 163-278.9A(a)(3) reads as rewritten:

"(3) 48-Hour Report. – A referendum committee that receives a contribution or transfer of funds shall disclose within 48 hours of receipt a contribution or transfer of ~~one-two~~ thousand dollars ~~(\$1,000)-(\$2,000)~~ or more received before a referendum but after the period covered by the last report due before that referendum. The disclosure shall be by report to the ~~State Board of Elections~~ identifying the source and amount of such funds. The ~~State Board of Elections~~ shall specify the form and manner of making the report, including the reporting of in-kind contributions. The State Board shall increase the dollar amount of the reporting threshold effective each election cycle beginning on the period from January 1 of an odd-numbered year through December 31 of the next even-numbered year based on the Consumer Price Index as provided in G.S. 163-278.13(b). The State Board shall set the revised threshold in October of the even-numbered year, publish the revised threshold in the North Carolina Register, and notify the Revisor of Statutes who shall adjust the dollar amount in this subdivision."

SECTION 4.4.(c) No earlier than October 1, 2026, the State Board of Elections shall adjust the thresholds imposed by G.S. 163-278.9(a)(2) and G.S. 163-278.9A(a)(3), as enacted by this section, effective for the election cycle beginning January 1, 2027.

SECTION 4.4.(d) Except as otherwise provided, this section becomes effective January 1, 2027.

EXEMPT POLITICAL PARTY COMMITTEES FROM CAMPAIGN SALES REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SECTION 4.5.(a) G.S. 163-278.8A reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-278.8A. Campaign sales by political party ~~executive committees, committees and affiliated party committees.~~

(a) Exempt Purchase Price Not Treated as "Contribution." – Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 163-278.6(13), the purchase price of goods or services sold by a political party ~~executive~~ committee or affiliated party committee as provided in subsection (b) of this section shall not be treated as a "contribution" for purposes of account-keeping under G.S. 163-278.8,

for purposes of the reporting of contributions under G.S. 163-278.11, or for the purpose of the limit on contributions under G.S. 163-278.13. The treasurer is not required to obtain, maintain, or report the name or other identifying information of the purchaser of the goods or services, as long as the requirements of subsection (b) of this section are satisfied. However, the proceeds from the sales of those goods and services shall be treated as contributions for other purposes, and expenditures of those proceeds shall be reported as expenditures under this Article.

(b) **Exempt Purchase Price.** – A purchase price for goods or services sold by a political party ~~executive~~-committee or affiliated party committee qualifies for the exemption provided in subsection (a) of this section as long as the sale of the goods or services adheres to a plan that the treasurer has submitted to and that has been approved in writing by the Executive Director of the State Board of Elections. The Executive Director shall approve the treasurer's plan upon and only upon finding that all the following requirements are satisfied:

- (1) That the price to be charged for the goods or services is reasonably close to the market price for the goods or services.
- (2) That the total amount to be raised from sales under all plans by the committee does not exceed twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) per election cycle.
- (3) That no purchaser makes total purchases under the plan that exceed fifty-one hundred dollars (\$50.00)-(\$100.00).
- (4) That the treasurer include in the report under G.S. 163-278.11, covering the relevant time period, all of the following:
 - a. A description of the plan.
 - b. The amount raised from sales under the plan.
 - c. The number of purchases made.
- (5) That the treasurer shall include in the appropriate report under G.S. 163-278.11 any in-kind contribution made to the political party in providing the goods or services sold under the plan and that no in-kind contribution accepted as part of the plan violates any provision of this Article.

The Executive Director may require a format for submission of a plan, but that format shall not place undue paperwork burdens upon the treasurer. As used in this subdivision, the term "election cycle" has the same meaning as in G.S. 163-278.6(32).

(c) For purposes of this section, "political party committee" means a political party executive committee or any group established by a political party, including, but not limited to, men, women, college, teen, senior, young, African American, or Hispanic clubs or organizations."

SECTION 4.5.(b) This section becomes effective January 1, 2027, and applies to the purchase price of goods or services sold by a political party committee or an affiliated party committee on or after that date.

PART V. SEVERABILITY CLAUSE AND EFFECTIVE DATE

SECTION 5.1. If any provision of this act or its application to any person, group of persons, or circumstances is held invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this act that can be given effect without the invalid provisions or application and, to this end, the provisions of this act are severable.

SECTION 5.2. Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes law.