



SENATE BILL 724: Expand Access to Voter ID & Voting.

2021-2022 General Assembly

Committee:	Senate Rules and Operations of the Senate	Date:	June 10, 2021
Introduced by:	Sens. Newton, Daniel, Hise	Prepared by:	Jessica Sammons
Analysis of:	Second Edition		Committee Co-Counsel

OVERVIEW: *Senate Bill 724 would do the following:*

- *Authorize visually impaired voters to cast an absentee ballot online using a visually impaired portal maintained by the State Board of Elections.*
- *Allow eligible voters to register to vote and update voter registration information online.*
- *State the intent of the General Assembly to fund a program to identify and assist voters needing photo identification in order to vote in person.*

Part I – Online Voting Portal for Visually Impaired Voters:

CURRENT LAW: Any qualified voter in this State may cast an absentee ballot in a statewide primary, general, or special election on constitutional amendments, referenda or bond proposals. Any qualified voter of a county is also authorized to cast an absentee ballot in a primary or election conducted by the county board of elections.

BILL ANALYSIS: Section 1 would provide that a visually impaired voter may request to cast an absentee ballot through a visually impaired portal established and maintained by the State Board. A voter would indicate on an absentee ballot request form that he or she requests access to the portal. In doing so, the individual would certify that he or she is visually impaired and meets all other requirements to cast an absentee ballot. Upon receiving the request, the county board of elections would email the voter a link to access the portal.

For purposes of casting an absentee ballot using the visually impaired portal, the visually impaired voter and any witnesses would be authorized to electronically sign the application. The visually impaired voter must comply with all other requirements for casting an absentee ballot.

In order to be counted, ballots submitted using the visually impaired portal would be required to comply with the following:

- Be returned electronically to the county board of elections by 7:30 P.M. on the day of the election.
- Witnessed just as any other mail-in absentee ballot, except that a notary shall not be permitted unless remote notarization is otherwise allowed by State law.
- The signatures of the visually impaired voter and witnesses shall be submitted at the same time as the voted ballot.

Part II – Online Voter Registration:

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CURRENT LAW: Individuals applying for voter registration or updating voter registration information may submit an application by mail, fax, scan, or in person. Additionally, individuals may register to vote or update voter registration information at a North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office or by using the DMV's secure internet website. Certain public agencies are also required to offer voter registration services, such as public assistance agencies and employment agencies.

Generally, the deadline to register to vote is twenty-five (25) days before a primary or election. However, if an individual has become qualified to register after the twenty-fifth day before a primary or election, that individual may apply to register on that primary or election day. Individuals may also register to vote or update the individual's name and address and cast a ballot via same-day registration at an early voting site during the "one-stop" early voting period.

BILL ANALYSIS: Section 2 would require the State Board to establish on its website the ability for an individual who is eligible to register to vote and who possesses a NC drivers license or special identification card for nonoperators to submit the following online:

- An application for voter registration or to report a change of name, address, or party affiliation.
- Authorization to affix the individual's signature to the application.
- Information to establish that the individual is eligible to register to vote online.
- The individual's email address.

Upon the individual's submission, the State Board would be required to verify the individual's drivers license, date of birth, and social security number, and proceed as follows:

- If the State Board is able to verify this information, the State Board must obtain the individual's electronic signature from the DMV and forward the application to the appropriate county board of elections.
- If the State Board is not able to verify this information, the State Board must inform the individual submitting the application that the application cannot be processed as submitted, and allow the individual an opportunity to cure deficiencies or otherwise register to vote.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2022. The State Board of Elections may begin rulemaking in accordance with G.S. 163-82.5A, as enacted by this act, prior to January 1, 2022, but no temporary or permanent rule shall become effective prior to January 1, 2022. The State Board of Elections may initiate any needed requests for proposals for development of the secure internet site, as required by G.S. 163-82.5A, as enacted by this act, prior to January 1, 2022.

Part III – Establish a Program to Identify & Assist Voters Needing Photo ID:

BILL ANALYSIS: Section 3 would state the intent of the General Assembly to appropriate money to fund a program to identify individuals who need photo identification in order to vote in person. This program would be required to include a mobile component allowing for visits to individuals who are identified as needing photo identification in order to vote in person.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Effective when it becomes law, except as otherwise provided in Part II.