



HOUSE BILL 958: Election Law Changes.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Committee:		Date:	June 24, 2026
Introduced by:	Reps. Blackwell, Stevens	Prepared by:	Erika Churchill, Jessica Sammons, Hillary Woodard
Analysis of:	Fifth Edition		Staff Attorneys

OVERVIEW: *The bill would make various changes to the State's election laws.*

CURRENT LAW & BILL ANALYSIS:

General Election Administration: The State Board of Elections (State Board) administers elections; oversees campaign finance laws; and provides guidance, advice, and training to the county boards of elections (county board). Each county board has supervisory authority over the conduct of elections within that county. Precinct officials include the chief judge, judges of election, and assistants appointed to serve in an election, and they must meet certain requirements in order to be eligible to serve.

The bill would make the following changes with respect to general election administration:

- Prohibit State Board and county board members from making any statements intended for general distribution to support or oppose any candidate or political party, or encourage or influence voter turnout for a particular political party, advocacy group, or candidate, or for an election. (**Section 3.1**)
- Increase county board member compensation from \$25 per meeting to \$100 per meeting, effective July 1, 2027. (**Section 3.4**)
- Authorize the State Board to employ staff counsel or retain private counsel to provide legal services, rather than the Attorney General. (**Section 3.2**)
- Require petitions seeking review of any State Board decision to be filed in either the Superior Court of Wake County or the superior court of the county in which the person seeking review resides. (**Section 3.3**)
- Authorize the Executive Director to exempt up to 7 employees of the State Board from the provisions of the North Carolina Human Resources Act. (**Section 3.5**)
- Require party designations for partisan ballot items to be printed in the same font type and size as the name of a candidate, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.1**)
- Require a candidate filing in a party primary to be affiliated with that political party for at least 365 days as of the date of filing rather than 90 days, unless a waiver is granted by the State executive committee of that political party or the political party has been recognized by the State for less than two years. (**Section 2.13**)
- Clarify that a county board may suspend or remove precinct officials at any time, including throughout the day of a primary or election, authorize a county board to prohibit a precinct official

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from serving in any subsequent election, specify training requirements for precinct officials, and require county boards to appoint at least four emergency election-day assistants, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.2**)

- Authorize a nonpartisan candidate to designate one registered voter to serve as an observer at each voting place where the candidate would appear on the ballot for a municipal election, special district election, or board of education election, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.6**)
- Move the October primary for the nonpartisan primary and election method and the October election for the nonpartisan election and runoff method to September of the odd-numbered year, with the election or runoff, if needed, held in November of that odd-numbered year, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.12**)
- Require the State Auditor to conduct post-election audits of election system and controls after each general election, authorize election officials to be present during the audit, and require the State Auditor to produce annual reports of the audits conducted and make them accessible on the Office of the State Auditor's website in perpetuity. (**Section 2.11**)
- Clarify that counties, cities, and local boards of education must use the most recent federal decennial census data when establishing or revising electoral district boundaries and not other population estimates. (**Part VI**)
- Require the UNC School of Government and State Board to jointly develop a uniform training for county board employees. (**Part VIII**)

Voter Registration: Individuals applying for voter registration or updating voter registration information may submit a voter registration application by mail, fax, scan, or in person. Additionally, an individual may complete an application to register to vote or update their voter registration when applying for original issuance, renewal, or correction of a drivers license or special identification card at the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or by using the DMV's online website.

When a county board receives a voter registration application, the county board must make a determination whether the applicant is or is not qualified vote at the address given, subject to a mail verification process. If the county board makes a tentative determination that the applicant is qualified to vote at the address given, the county board must send a notice to the applicant by nonforwardable mail stating that the county board will register the applicant to vote if the notice is not returned as undeliverable. If this notice is returned as undeliverable, then a second notice must be sent by nonforwardable mail.

The State Board and county boards are required to maintain the list of eligible voters in the State by removing ineligible voters and updating addresses and other necessary data of those who remain on the official list of eligible voters. To comply with list maintenance requirements, the State Board and county boards may enter into data sharing agreements with other states to cross-check information on voter registration and voting records.

Any registered voter of the county may challenge the right of any person to register, remain registered, or vote in the county. Challenges can be made to a ballot cast during early one-stop voting or on the day of the primary or election, at the time the voter votes in person, or to a traditional mail-in absentee ballot up to 5:00 PM on the fifth business day after the election, and may be made based on residency, age, felony conviction, death, citizenship, or that a person is not who he or she represents himself or herself to be. A decision made by the county board may be appealed to the Superior Court in the county where the challenge originated. Only those against whom a challenge is sustained or persons who have made a challenge which is overruled have standing to file an appeal.

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The bill would make the following changes regarding voter registration and voter challenges:

- Require the State Board to forward any voter registration applications to the county board in a timely manner, or within two business days of receipt if received by the State Board within 100 days before an election, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.4**)
- For any voter registration application received within 100 days before an election, require the county board to send the first address verification notice within two business days of processing the application and the second notice within one business day of receiving notice that the first notice was undeliverable, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.4**)
- Prohibit any employee of the DMV or a public agency offering voter registration services from proceeding with a voter registration application unless the applicant indicates that he or she is a citizen of the United States, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.10**)
- Provide that the county board is to process only those voter registration applications affirmatively indicating that the applicant is a U.S. citizen. If the voter registration application does not indicate whether the applicant is a U.S. citizen, the county board must send the applicant a form to indicate whether he or she is a citizen of the United States. If an applicant, within 30 days, returns the form indicating that he or she is a citizen of the United States, the county board would proceed with processing the voter registration application, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.10**)
- Provide that disclosure of any voter registration data received from other states pursuant to a data sharing agreement with that state would be controlled by the data sharing agreement, provided that the data sharing agreement is not more restrictive than the other states' public records law, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.7**)
- Establish a process for the Executive Director to use information received from a federal agency to identify registered voters who are deceased and provide those names to the county boards. The chair of the county board would be required to initiate a challenge proceeding for any name identified and distributed to the county board, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.7**)
- Authorize the DMV to disclose an applicant's social security number to the State Board for the purpose of voter registration and list maintenance and require the DMV to provide the State Board with each month's data on a routine schedule of no later than the fifteenth day each month, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.7**)
- Provide that a ballot cast during early one-stop voting may be challenged no later than the close of polls on Election Day, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.8**)
- Provide that if a ballot challenged based on death of the voter is upheld, no portion of the challenged ballot may be counted if the voter died between the time the challenged ballot was cast and 11:59 P.M. on the day before the election, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.8**)
- Require the State Board to conduct a uniform statewide audit to determine if ballots cast during early one-stop voting or traditional mail-in absentee ballots are ineligible to be counted as evidenced by official government database records and distribute lists of potentially ineligible voters to the county boards no later than 5:00 P.M. on the third business day after the election. The county board would be required to review the results of the State Board's audit and serve a challenge on the voter if the ballot is identified as ineligible to be counted no later than 5:00 P.M. on the sixth business day after the election, effective January 1, 2027. (**Section 2.8**)

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Conduct of Elections: If ballots cast during the early one-stop voting period are counted electronically, those ballots must be counted at the time polls close on Election Day. If ballots cast during the early one-stop voting period are paper ballots and counted manually, then those ballots are counted at the same time as traditional mail-in absentee ballots. County boards must convene at 5:00 P.M. on Election Day to count traditional mail-in absentee ballots received through 7:30 P.M. on Election Day, with the meeting continuing until the counting is finished and county board members not leaving the counting place except for unavoidable necessity. The county boards must announce a tally of all traditional mail-in absentee ballots cast by 5:00 P.M. on the third business day after the election (Friday), except for those traditional mail-in absentee ballots subject to a challenge or those cast in accordance with Article 21A of Chapter 163.

Voters receive a provisional ballot when questions arise about the voter's qualification to vote, the voter's eligibility to vote in a given election, the voter's eligibility to vote a specific ballot style, or when a voter does not or cannot present a photo ID when voting in person. Provisional ballots that require additional documentation in order for the ballot to be counted will only be counted if the registered voter that voted the provisional ballot brings the required documentation to the county board by 5:00 P.M. on the third business day after the election (Friday). If the county board finds that an individual was otherwise eligible to vote when returning the required documentation, then the provisional ballot must be counted by that county board.

The county boards must notify a voter if the voter's container-return envelope for a traditional mail-in absentee ballot contains a curable deficiency. The voter must provide cure documentation no later than noon on the third business day after the election (Friday) in order for the ballot to be counted.

The Uniform Military and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) provides that covered voters may register to vote, request a ballot, and cast an absentee ballot either electronically or via mail. Covered voters include the following individuals:

- A uniformed-service voter or an overseas voter who is registered to vote in this State.
- A uniformed-service voter whose voting residence is in this State and otherwise satisfied the State's voter eligibility requirements.
- An overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, was last eligible to vote in this State and, except for a State residency requirement, otherwise satisfies all other requirements to vote in this State.
- An overseas voter who, before leaving the United States, would have been last eligible to vote in this State had the voter then been of voting age and, except for a State residency requirement, otherwise satisfies all other requirements to vote in this State.
- An overseas voter who was born outside the United States, and, except for a State residency requirement, otherwise satisfies all other requirements to vote in this State, if:
 - The last place where a parent or legal guardian of the voter was, or would have been, eligible to vote before leaving the United States is within this State; and
 - The voter has not previously registered to vote in any other state.

The bill would make the following changes regarding the conduct of an election:

- Require each county board to ensure all voting equipment using during the early one-stop voting period is rendered unable to receive additional votes associated with the early one-stop voting period, is used in a manner that does not reveal the result of the early one-stop voting vote count

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prior to the close of polls on Election Day, and require that any paper ballots or electronic records of votes cast during the early one-stop voting period are stored in a locked and secured space, access to which is controlled with chain of custody limited and maintained, and are stored separate and apart from each other. **(Section 2.5)**

- Clarify that the definition of "public building or facility" includes one that is temporarily in use as a voting site or being prepared for use as a voting site for purposes of prohibitions on disorderly conduct in or near any public buildings or facilities, defacing any public buildings or facilities, or committing any nuisance in or near any public buildings or facilities, effective October 1, 2026. **(Section 2.3)**
- Make it a Class 3 misdemeanor for a person to steal, deface, vandalize, or unlawfully remove political advertising that is lawfully placed in the buffer zone, effective October 1, 2026. **(Section 2.3)**
- With respect to ballot counting:
 - Make it a Class I felony for any person to knowingly reveal the result of any count of ballots prior to the close of polls on Election Day. **(Section 1.6)**
 - Require county boards to begin counting early one-stop ballots cast during early one-stop voting and traditional mail-in absentee ballots at the time set between 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. on Election Day in a resolution adopted at least two weeks prior to Election Day. The county board would be authorized to recess the meeting, but not adjourn the meeting, prior to completing the count of absentee ballots. The State Board would be required to adopt rules as to the content of minutes kept by the county board relating to what transpired before and after any recess, including how to document the number of outstanding traditional mail-in absentee and early one-stop ballots immediately before and after any recess. **(Section 1.1(c) and Section 1.5)**
 - Regarding absentee ballots:
 - Provide that if an absentee ballot is physically handed to an election official by the voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian, the person returning the ballot must sign an affidavit as to their eligibility to return the ballot, effective January 1, 2027. **(Section 1.4)**
 - Extend the time for county boards to announce a tally of all traditional mail-in absentee and early one-stop ballots cast, other than those subject to a challenge and military and overseas ballots, to no later than the close of business on the fifth business day after the election. **(Section 1.5)**
 - Regarding deficiencies in cast ballots that may be cured, permit cure documentation to be returned to a county board no later than noon on the fifth business day after the election (Tuesday) in order for the ballot to be counted and require the county board to notify the voter of the curable deficiency no later than close of business on the next business day following the county board's review of the via mail, and telephone and email if available. **(Section 1.2, Section 1.3, Section 4.4)**
 - For UOCAVA ballots containing a curable deficiency, permit the cure documentation to be returned to the county board no later than 11:00 A.M. on the day of county canvass in order for the ballot to be counted, effective January 1, 2027. **(Section 4.4)**

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- Regarding provisional ballots, require the county board to determine whether to count a provisional ballot for lack of photo ID by the date of canvass if the county board determines the affidavit for lack of photo ID is false within five days of the election. (**Section 1.1(c)**)
- With respect to UOCAVA, effective January 1, 2027:
 - Remove "never residents" from the definition of covered voter. (**Section 4.1**)
 - Assign overseas voters an address that is in the same precinct or an adjacent precinct to the address of the last place of residence of the voter in this State, if that address is no longer a recognized residential address. (**Section 4.2**)
 - Require covered voters to submit a photocopy of identification or an affidavit of an exception with a returned military-overseas ballot. (**Section 4.3**)
- Require the State Board to study and report on the feasibility, costs, and technical considerations of using signature verification technology. (**Part VII**)

Campaign Finance: Candidates for office are required to file reports for certain contributions, loans, and expenditures unless a candidate does not receive more than \$1,000 in contributions and loans and does not spend more than \$1,000. Generally, the treasurer must also include certain information in required reports, including the name, address, and principal occupation of all contributors or payees. However, if an individual contributes \$50 or less within specified time frames, the report is not required to include the name, address, or principal occupation of that individual. Any monetary contribution in excess of \$50 and any expenditure for nonmedia expenses of more than \$50 must be made by a form of verifiable payment.

The purchase price of goods or services sold by a political party executive committee or an affiliated party committee are not considered campaign contributions, in that these are not subject to the account-keeping or reporting requirements required for campaign contributions and are not subject to the limit on campaign contributions.

With respect to independent expenditures, an individual or entity making an independent expenditure who is not otherwise required to file a report, but who makes an independent expenditure in excess of \$100, must file a statement of the independent expenditure with the appropriate board of elections.

Candidates and political committees are prohibited from accepting contributions from any corporation and any business entity, labor union, professional association, or insurance company. Political parties and affiliated committees are also prohibited from accepting contributions from any corporation and any business entity, labor union, professional association, or insurance company, unless that contribution is used for a political party headquarters building fund, which requires a segregated account. Generally, it is unlawful for any corporation, business entity, labor union, professional association or insurance company to do any of the following:

- Make any contribution to a candidate or political committee.
- Pay or use or offer, consent or agree to pay or use any of its money or property for any contribution to a candidate or political committee.
- To compensate, reimburse, or indemnify any person or individual for money or property so used for any contribution or expenditure so made.

It is also unlawful for any officer, director, stockholder, attorney, agent or member of any corporation, business entity, labor union, professional association or insurance company to aid, abet, advise or consent to any such contribution. A violation of these provisions is a Class 2 misdemeanor.

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The bill would make the following changes to campaign finance reporting requirements, effective January 1, 2027:

- Expand the exemption for political party executive committees for campaign sales to include political party committees, which would be defined to include men, women, college, teen, senior, young, African American, and Hispanic clubs or organizations. **(Section 5.4)**
- Make the following increases to the reporting thresholds:
 - For candidates with contributions, loans, and expenditures to be exempted from reporting requirements: from \$1,000 to \$3,000. **(Section 5.1(a))**
 - For when independent expenditures must be reported: from \$100 to \$1,000. **(Section 5.1(b))**
 - For when 48-hour reports are required: from \$1,000 to \$2,000. **(Section 5.2)**
 - For nonmedia expenditures and monetary contributions to be made with a verifiable form of payment: from \$50 to \$100. **(Section 5.5)**
- With respect to foreign nationals, **Section 5.3** would do all of the following:
 - Define foreign national as any one of the following:
 - An individual who is not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States.
 - A government of a foreign country or any political subdivision thereof.
 - A foreign political party.
 - Any person organized under the law of, or that has its principal place of business in a foreign country.
 - Any person organized and operating in the United States that is wholly or majority owned by a foreign national or combination of foreign nationals unless both of the following apply:
 - Any contribution or expenditure made derives entirely from funds generated by the United States.
 - All decisions concerning the contribution or expenditure are made by individuals who are United States citizens or lawful permanent residents, except for setting overall budget amounts.
 - Prohibit foreign nationals from engaging in any of the following:
 - Making a contribution to a candidate, a political committee, a political party, or an affiliated committee, including to a political party headquarters building fund.
 - Directing, dictating, controlling or participating in the decision-making of any activities to influence a referendum, including making contributions or independent expenditures.
 - Soliciting a contribution or expenditure to influence a referendum.
 - Prohibit a candidate, political committee, political party, affiliated committee, or treasurer from soliciting or accepting a contribution from a foreign national.
 - Require the treasurer to file an organizational funding certification which must include a signed statement, filed with the State Board no later than the tenth day following the

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organization of a referendum committee, affirming that no preliminary activity was funded by one or more foreign nationals. Preliminary activity would include conducting polls, public opinion surveys, or a focus group; drafting referendum language; making telephone calls; and traveling. All reports required to be filed disclosing contributions would also be required to include an affirmation by the treasurer that the contributor associated with each contribution is not a foreign national. Such reports are signed under penalty of perjury, with any person making a certification knowing the information to be untrue guilty of a Class I felony.

- Require the treasurer to include with any required report disclosing contributions an affirmation by the treasurer that the donor associated with each contribution is not a foreign national and the donor has not knowingly or willfully received, solicited, or accepted contributions from one or more foreign national aggregating in excess of \$10,000 within the four-year period immediately preceding the date of the contribution.
- Upon receipt of a contribution, require the treasurer to obtain an affirmation from the donor that the donor is not a foreign national and that the donor has not knowingly or willfully accepted funds aggregating in excess of \$10,000 from one or more foreign national within the four-year period immediately preceding the date the contribution is made. The treasurer would also be required to include records of those donor affirmations in the detailed account records required.
- Make intentional disclosure of confidential information or materials related to any investigation for violations of the above provisions a Class 2 misdemeanor.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes law.