

## **"Voting at the Polls": Information for Voters**

The decision to exercise your right to vote is an important one. In NC, election officials are dedicated to providing every voter a positive voting experience. This guide has been prepared to give you a simple insight into what can be expected at the polls on Election Day. As always, if you have questions or concerns about your election day experience, your state and local boards of elections are more than happy to provide you with whatever assistance you may need.

### **Prior to Election Day**

Preparation is key to a positive Election Day experience. Before voting, you must be registered to vote. The deadline for registering to vote is 25 days before Election Day and during the One-Stop Absentee voting period (19-3 days prior to the election) If you have registered, it is always a good idea to check your registration to make sure that all information is correct. The NC State Board of Elections provides voters the ability to check registration on its website. If you haven't registered or you need to update your registration, your local board of elections can assist you in getting the proper form. You can also download the registration form from the State Board of Elections website ([www.sboe.state.nc.us](http://www.sboe.state.nc.us).) New registrations or updates are due by 5 PM the 25<sup>th</sup> day before Election Day. When you are completing your registration form, make sure to read and follow all of the instructions. North Carolina does allow the following people to register and vote on Election Day: individuals who are naturalized as US citizens after the registration deadline but before or on Election Day; individuals whose citizenship rights are restored after a felony conviction if those rights are restored after the registration deadline but before or on Election Day; individuals serving in the US armed forces, their spouses, disabled war veterans, civilians attached to the US armed forces serving outside the US and members of the Peace Corps who are absent on the day the registration records close and return to their NC county of residence by Election Day.

### **Arriving at the Polls**

NC polling places open on Election Day at 6:30 AM and close at 7:30 PM. Election officials arrive at 6:00 AM to prepare polling places. When you arrive at your assigned polling place, you should park in the designated area. Handicapped accessible spaces are also available and clearly marked. In most cases the entire parking lot can be used for voter parking; however, polling places that are located in larger buildings may have only a portion of the lot. In either case, parking available to voters should be clearly identified.

### **Curbside Voting**

NC law permits voters who are physically unable to enter the polling place to vote from their vehicle. Many counties use an alert system to let precinct officials inside know that someone is waiting to vote curbside, although you may also see a precinct official or student assistant waiting to assist curbside voters. Voters who cast their ballot using the curbside voting process must be registered to vote like any other voter and cast the same ballot as all other voters. Curbside voters are also required to sign a statement that they are eligible to vote curbside.

### **Entering the Polling Place**

Once you have parked, you should look for the designated entrance of the polling place. The pathway to the entrance should be clearly marked with directional signs and marked in some manner. There are several other areas outside the polling place that may be of interest to voters.

### **Electioneering and the Buffer Zone**

At almost every polling place, candidates and their supporters are permitted to display and distribute campaign signs and literature. NC law requires that any campaign related activity be

conducted beyond a buffer zone of 25 to 50 feet from the entrance to the polling place. The law also establishes a buffer zone that marks the point at which campaign activity is strictly prohibited. Both the electioneering area and buffer zone should be clearly marked with signs and/or boundary markers such as rope or tape. If you see electioneering taking place in any area where it is not permitted, please let an election official know immediately.

### **Polling Place Entrance**

The door to the polling place should be clearly identified. If the entrance is not easily accessible by people with disabilities, the local board of elections may have installed temporary measures such as ramps or stationed a precinct assistant to help voters. If there is no way to make the entrance accessible, an additional entrance may be used.

### **Inside the Polling Place**

After you enter the polling place, you should proceed directly to the registration table. If you arrive at the polls during a busy time (early morning, lunchtime and early evening are often the busiest), you may have to wait in line. If you have to wait, please take the opportunity to review the information posted at the entrance. You should see: sample ballots, a copy of the absentee list (this lists all of the voters who have cast a mail-in absentee ballot or voted one-stop absentee prior to Election Day), a large voter information poster that lists your rights and responsibilities as a voter along with other important information, a poster that explains how to use the voting equipment and other signs that provide vital instructions regarding the voting process. Also stationed at the entrance may be a precinct official conducting voting equipment demonstrations and/or providing general assistance. If you need a precinct official, look for individuals wearing vests and/or nametags. In each polling place there are one chief judge and two judges and there may be multiple assistants.

### **Requesting Assistance**

If you need assistance with the voting process, you must request it from the chief judge. Every voter can have assistance from the following near relatives: spouse, parent (including in-law and step relations), child (including in-law and step relations), brother, sister, grandparent, grandchild. Voters who are blind, illiterate or disabled may have assistance from anyone they choose except for their employer, an agent of their employer, or an officer or agent of their union.

### **The Registration Table**

When you get to the registration table, you should state your name and address. If the election is a primary, you should also state your political party. If you are registered as "unaffiliated" and it is a primary, you will be asked to select a party ballot. If you are not able to speak, you may write the information. Once the precinct official locates your information, you will be asked to sign your name. If this is the first time you have voted since you registered, you may be asked to show a form of ID. This will happen only if you did not submit the proper ID along with your initial registration. From this table you will either be given a ballot and directed to a voting booth (Optical Scan), be directed to a ballot table, be sent directly to a voting booth (DRE) or be directed to a "help table."

### **The Help Table**

If the precinct officials at the registration table cannot verify your registration information, you will be directed to the help table. There are many reasons why voter information cannot be verified. Whatever the reason, precinct officials and your county board office will make every attempt to determine your eligibility. If you have moved within your voting precinct and need to change your information you may do so at the polls and still cast your vote. Most likely, you will be asked to complete a voter registration form and then vote as you normally would. The new information will be returned to the county board office and your record will be updated after the election.

If you have moved to a different precinct within the county, the county board of elections can do a precinct transfer to a central location or to your new precinct, or you can vote a provisional ballot at your old precinct. If there appears to be no record of your registration, you can vote a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots will be counted for those races for which you were an eligible voter. In either case, you have the opportunity to update your voting information. Provisional ballots are returned to the county board for review and eligible ballots are counted in the county board of elections prior to the canvass day meeting. Provisional ballots will be counted for those races for which you were an eligible voter. If you do vote a provisional ballot, you will receive information about how to find out whether or not your ballot was counted in whole or in part and the reason why it was not counted.

### **Voting a Provisional Ballot**

If you vote a provisional ballot, the following will happen:

- You will be given a provisional ballot envelope. This envelope contains an area for you to provide your registration information and an area for you to attest to your eligibility as a voter. You are required to complete both of these sections in order for your ballot to be considered for counting. If you need help completing the envelope, you may request as much help as you need. The precinct official should check for complete information before you go to the next step.
- Once you have completed the envelope, you will be given a ballot and instructions for completing that ballot. You will be directed to a private area in which to mark your ballot.
- After you have finished marking your ballot, you should place that ballot inside your completed provisional envelope. Make sure that you seal only your ballot inside the envelope and return it to the precinct official at the help table.
- The precinct official at the help table will review your provisional envelope to make sure that all of the necessary information is included and give you printed instructions for finding out if your ballot was counted. If your ballot isn't counted, you can also find out why it was not counted. At no time should the precinct official handle your actual ballot unless you have requested assistance and in providing that assistance, it is necessary to do so.
- Your provisional ballot will be stored in a secure location and returned to the county board office after the polls close.

### **Voting an Optical Scan Ballot**

You will receive a ballot that shows all of the races for which you are eligible to vote. You will be directed to a voting booth and given time to mark your ballot. It is important that you read and understand all directions before voting. If you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to ask. Once you are comfortable with the instructions, you should mark your ballot, review it for accuracy and take it to the area marked for deposit (the tabulator.) If you make an error in marking your ballot, you may request another ballot. Simply return your spoiled ballot to the ballot table. **If you have already deposited your ballot, you may not receive another.** The scanner will only accept one ballot at a time, so you may not attempt to deposit your ballot at the same time as another voter. After depositing your ballot, you should immediately exit the polling place.

### **Voting a Direct Record Electronic Ballot**

You will be directed to a voting booth, where a precinct official will assist you by setting up the voting machine to display your ballot. It is important that you read and understand all directions before voting. If you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to ask. Once you are comfortable with the instructions, make your choice(s) on the machine. Then review your choices for accuracy and press the button to cast your ballot. Once you have cast your ballot, you should immediately exit the polling place.

**Voting During Extended Hours**

In rare emergencies your polling place may stay open an extra hour, until 8:30 PM. If you vote under these conditions, you must vote a provisional ballot.