

# Friends Committee on North Carolina Legislation

## FACT SHEET on ELECTORAL REFORM

Making the 2020 election safe and secure

**FCNCL Policy Statement: We support electoral reform, led by the Quaker testimonies of Equality and Integrity and in support of our FCNCL minute on anti-racism.**

While North Carolina has sought to address the challenges that COVID-19 presents to full participation of voters in the 2020 election, there remain issues that expose voters, particularly Black and Brown voters, to unreasonable risks in casting their ballots. A recently enacted bill also included a photo voter ID provision even though multiple courts have blocked photo voter ID laws for their racially discriminatory intent and/or impact. This provision could be construed to be a last-minute attempt to revive the state's blocked law and confuse voters in the process.

**Every North Carolina voter deserves the best chance possible to stay safe and participate in the fast-approaching 2020 elections.** The work that voting advocates are turning to now include educating voters about the actual rules and options, advancing more reforms in the legislature, seeking relief through the courts (see information below on current court filings), and advocating for a political process clear of the remnants of systemic racism.

**Letters to your legislators remain effective and timely:** Here are important points to include in your letters and phone calls to your state representatives and senators:

- Oppose any photo ID requirements in 2020. The courts have already spoken.
- Give flexibility back to the counties to allow early voting sites to vary hours of operation, but not to impose new restrictions or take other actions that would limit voter access.
- Specify and improve polling locations and practices to ensure safety for in-person voting.
- Allow and fund contactless drop box delivery to make submitting the completed ballot safer.
- Seek to extend the 25-day limit for making changes to voter registration and expand registration options for new voters when past/current voter registration practices are limited by safer-at-home orders and cancelled public events. Specifically, currently any changes in the voter registration application must be sent to the appropriate county board of elections by the voter registration

deadline, which is 25 days before each election, but the hardships caused by the current pandemic demand greater flexibility.

- Eliminate uniform staff at all polling places and redirect funds saved to pay for the NC Board of Elections to mail out the mail-in request forms to every registered voter (This is not for mailing out the mail-in ballots themselves, as registered voters would still have to request a mail-in ballot).
- Extend the deadline for receipt of ballots until nine days after Election Day.
- Give voters a chance to fix signature discrepancies before election officials reject those ballots.

Given that election boards must work within the law as it is, points to include in communications with them should include concern that:

- Early voting sites and election day sites can accommodate large numbers of voters maintaining social distancing while inside and while waiting in line.
- Masks be worn in all enclosed spaces.
- Adequate facilities be made available for the processing of large numbers of mail-in ballots, such that employees can maintain social distancing.

### **Additional Information**

From the News & Observer, May 29, 2020

Voting rights groups have filed a federal lawsuit against the N.C. Board of Elections and other state officials demanding they change elections law to allow safer balloting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Filed Friday (May 29, 2020) in U.S. District Court, the suit is brought by the nonprofit Democracy NC and the League of Women Voters on behalf of multiple citizens who are either elderly or disabled. The challengers have conditions including diabetes, hypertension, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, making them more vulnerable to coronavirus.

The suit alleges North Carolina has failed to adjust its elections laws to make voting easier for these and other citizens, and **that several rules now in place threaten to either dampen turnout or help spread the virus.**

Among those rules, as described in the lawsuit:

- That the state requires registration 25 days before Election Day or in-person at an early-voting site, forcing people to expose themselves to crowds.
- That voters must fill out absentee ballots with a witness or notary, increasing contact with other people. (*New legislation reduced witnesses from two to one*)
- That the state requires uniform staff at all polling places regardless of capacity or demand, leading to higher costs and reduced hours.
- That poll workers are required to live in their districts, leading to staff shortages, consolidated precincts, and long lines. (*Addressed in new legislation*)

The challengers ask the court to declare the state's rules unconstitutional, extend registration periods, allow safer, contact-free absentee voting, and expand voter education.

In a different lawsuit this month, a group of voters backed by Democratic legal groups sued North Carolina seeking to loosen rules around mail-in ballots, The News & Observer reported. They want the state to provide prepaid postage on all absentee ballots, change a requirement for two witnesses to sign a ballot (*New legislation reduced witnessed from two to one*), extend the deadline for receipt of ballots until nine days after Election Day and give voters a chance to fix signature discrepancies before election officials reject those ballots.

North Carolina's state board of elections endorsed the first two provisions in a proposed list of election changes released in March.

North Carolina has no-excuse absentee voting, so all voters can request mail-in ballots.