

Citizens' Recommendation Report for North Carolina's Precinct Uniformity Project

Presented to the North Carolina State Board of Elections

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Introduction

Thank you for allowing us to submit this citizen recommendation report. We applaud the State Board of Elections for seeking to improve polling procedures and make them more uniform. We recognize that the members of the North Carolina State Board of Elections and the County Boards of Elections staff have spent months sifting through information in order to put forth their recommendations. We appreciate your willingness to review our findings and recommendations.

We are a diverse coalition of North Carolina voters who passionately believe that the participation in our elections and the confidence in the results is directly affected by the quality of our voter education and polling procedures. Part of providing quality voter education depends upon information about the process that is readily available and easily understood by the average layperson. Extra steps are necessary and worth while to improve voter participation in the democratic process.

Our group has accumulated comments on the voting process as experienced in the May 2006 primary and past experiences, and built that into the recommendations in this report.

We recommend enhancing the State Board of Elections' website to include a high profile, easily navigated webpage dedicated solely to voters. Voters should be able to obtain the answers to their questions in one central location, in easily understandable language. Voter education materials should be downloadable to facilitate easy distribution.

We also encourage the use of signage at the polling places and enclosures for on-the-spot voter education. Further we propose additional procedures that can be utilized to ensure that voters have confidence in the fairness and integrity of the elections.

We are very proud that our State has a Board of Elections that invites input from the public regarding the election process. A citizen's viewpoint is often overlooked when it should be an integral part of planning and policy. We ask that our recommendations be given strong consideration, and look forward to their implementation.

Using the Internet to Provide Access to Uniform Voter Education Materials

Voters' Bill of Rights and Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Voters' Bill of Rights are a requirement of HAVA - See Section 302.

Historically, voters' Bill of Rights have been created and maintained by citizens groups. By having experts at the State Board of Elections prepare these guides, citizens can be sure of having correct and helpful information.

Voter education can be exponentially improved by providing easily understandable answers to the voters' most Frequently Asked Questions, or voter FAQs. These should be available on a Voters Page on the website and also as downloadable flyers. Further we recommend the usage of simple language that the everyday layman can understand.

Distribution of Voter Education materials will be greatly augmented by local advocacy and citizens organizations that traditionally provide information to voters and citizens.

Downloadable flyers will be used by advocates to reach citizens who do not have internet access.

The SBOE can also increase voter participation by adding to their current Voter FAQs the following most frequently asked questions and their answers:

Convicted felons often contact NC Verified Voting with these issues:

Do not know what they need to do to register.

Do not know if their citizenship has been restored.

Do not know how to get their citizenship restored.

College Students need these questions answered about registering to vote and voting

If from out-of-state, should the student transfer their voter registration to the address they are living at while attending school?

If an out-of-state student transfers their registration to a local address, could that interfere with their grants or funding?

Can the student cast an absentee ballot through their home town elections office?

Where should/can the student vote?

Sample Voters FAQ Page

How do I...

Register to Vote?

When is the deadline to register to vote in time for the election?

I am an out of town college student, where do I vote?

I am a convicted felon, can I register to vote?

Find out where I go to vote?

What ID do I need to vote?

Find out which candidates are on the ballot?

Get a question on the ballot?

Find out who my elected officials are?

Get information about my rights and responsibilities as a voter?

Vote if I know I won't be in town on Election Day?

Get information about past elections?

Find out about upcoming elections?

Get election results?

The current webpage entitled Registering to vote in North Carolina is at this link:
<http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/voterweb/qualvote.htm>

Voter Education at the polling location – multiple opportunities:

Now that North Carolina provides a voter verified paper ballot, it is essential that Election Officials tell voters about it. Having a voter verified paper ballot gives the voter confidence that there is a permanent record of their vote. The paper ballot is especially reassuring to voters in the event that any voting machines malfunction. Instructions placed in the voting booth for optical scan voting are also reassuring to the voter.

Here are four actions the County Officials can use voter education to improve the voting process:

1. a. For touch screen locations: Detailed explanatory signs before people reach the registration table. The signs would explain that new state laws mandate a "verifiable" vote; therefore we are using the printer to do that. "IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU, AS THE VOTER, VERIFY YOUR VOTE ON THE PAPER PRINTOUT. DO NOT ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE RECORDED ANYTHING UNLESS YOU SEE IT ON THE PAPER." Some more explanation about using the touch screen etc. can be offered at this point.

1. b. At this level, we could be doing something similar for precincts that are using optical scan. Instead we would be focused on making sure they know how to properly mark their ballots.

2. At the registration table, they could ask the voter to look over this instruction sheet (which would essentially be the same thing that was on the previous sign.) This would reinforce the message. The voter could take it into the voting booth with them. (At the bottom of the sheet, it should tell them to leave the sheet at the booth. These can be collected and re-used.)

3. In the voting booth, there would be a message on the opening screen that stressed the need to verify their vote on the paper printout. For optical scan voting, instructions on how to properly mark the ballot can be posted in the voting enclosure. Example attached. Feedback from voters and poll workers shows that they do appreciate having the instructions available.

4. Above the printer, there would be a bold message, such as a 3”X5” sign here:



On the closing screen, there could be a final reminder for the voter to verify their vote. (This might be overkill, but I don't think we can stress this too much.)

Additional Protections Requested by Voters:

Voter Assistance Hotline Toll Free 1-866-###-###

During busy election years, voters need a hotline that can answer questions and also document any problems. This is essential as during a busy election day because otherwise voters will often reach a voice mail system when trying to reach their county board of elections.

Citizens request emergency or optional paper ballots -

Another need at polling sites where there are touch screen machines (DRE's): allow the voter to request a paper ballot, no questions asked. This can be an optical scan style ballot. Polling places already are required to have some paper ballots on hand to accommodate curbside voting. Curbside ballots have historically served as emergency ballots in the event that the touch-screen machines have broken down (as happened in Mecklenburg this May). These also could be used in the event that very long lines are forming.

Citizens provide the following reasons for the need to have the paper ballots:

1. Many tried the touch-screen machines and they did not work. Citizens have written up actual cases, with names & addresses, of people who complained about this.
2. Many need to early vote and if the DRE is the only option they have, but they don't trust it, they have lost their democratic right to vote.
3. Many cannot read the ballot on the DRE.

Provide instructions to the voters on verifying their vote on touch-screen machines

The integrity of election results is protected by the voter actually verifying his vote on a paper tape which is both difficult to see and to read. The integrity of the system is dependent on:

1. Recognition by the voter that his selection is that which is on the paper tape, and that it is necessary that this printed record be verified.
2. The voter even bothering to perform this verification before initiating acceptance, i.e. how many errors were missed due to the voter never having made the effort.
3. Ability of the voter to understand the procedures to cast, check and, if necessary, cancel what has been recorded.

The Voter Verified Paper Ballot protects your vote - make use of it!

Thanks to North Carolina's new law, voting is permitted only with optical scan machines, electronic recording machines (touch-screens) or paper ballots counted by hand. Electronic machines provide a paper printout that can be corrected by the voter before a ballot is recorded. This paper record will be retained by the election officials for audit and recount purposes.



Using the new touch screen machines:

The first step- touch the screen for the language.

Read the instructions and press the "view ballot" button at the bottom of the screen.

Second is to touch the yellow button to view the candidates and make selections by touching the box next to the name (to deselect, touch the box again).

Third, verify your vote on paper! As you vote you can review your selections on the paper printer at the left side of the machine, and make changes if needed.

When you finish, press "review" at the bottom of the screen. The machine will tell you if you skipped any races, and you can go back to change your choices if you want.

Press the red "vote" button above the screen or the green "press here to cast your ballot now" button on the screen.

You get one more chance to go back or press the green "confirm" button on the screen to cast your vote.



Using the new optical scan machines:

First you will get a ballot

Next, you shade in the circle completely for your choices on a paper ballot that resembles a multiple choice test.

The voter then feeds the ballot into the scanner, which counts the votes and stores the ballot in a secure manner. It doesn't matter which side or direction you feed the ballot into the machine.

The optical scan ballot is verified by the voter as they shade in their choices on the paper ballot.