



Our right to vote is in jeopardy. Under the guise of voter integrity, our state legislators are throwing our state and county boards of elections into a 5-alarm fire drill, scrambling to comply with new stricter voting legislation without providing additional funding, making voting harder. This is exactly what election deniers have demanded from them.

In a time when early and absentee voting have become the preferred methods of voters, North Carolina legislators are following a playbook designed by election deniers to remove or impede our ability to vote by these methods. But then they go further.

First, legislators intend to pass legislation that dramatically changes the way we vote by advancing two Senate bills, SB747 and SB749. Aside from placing restrictions on absentee and early voting, if enacted, SB747 would require the use of provisional voting instead of the option for same day registration. If you need to register to vote during early voting or have recently moved and fail to bring multiple forms of documentation with you to the polls, your vote may not count. This has a disparate effect on young voters who move frequently and will cause individuals to simply give up and go home without casting a ballot.

This bill gives a green light to individuals and groups to challenge any voter's absentee ballot, questioning that person's right to vote. It also allows anyone who wants to observe absentee ballot counts to "come on down" into the staff areas. We all should worry about privacy rights, especially as groups armed with voter lists start wandering around searching for specific ballot envelopes.

Second, by enacting Senate Bill 749, legislators hope to restructure how the NC State Board of Elections members are appointed, setting up a partisan split (deadlocked) board of elections with the tie-breaking vote given to who else? The same state legislature who seeks to circumvent normal checks and balances.

Third, by underfunding North Carolina Board of Elections, much like it has with public education, elections risk becoming less secure, and voting becomes harder for North Carolinians. Senate Bill 747 mandates signature-verification software but provides no funding. We have new voter ID rules and regulations but lack adequate funding for education and outreach.

Those who defend this legislation claim it reduces fraud and rebuilds trust in elections. However, by enacting dramatically restrictive and confusing legislation, and without fully funding the NC Board of Elections, it is creating opportunity for the exact outcome it seeks to reduce.

Long voting lines with limited or no early voting options, voter confusion, and the inability of boards of elections to secure staff and technology, will do nothing to ensure election security and integrity. Instead, these laws will cause interference in a system that has, up until this point, resulted in well-executed fair and free elections. The few attempts to influence elections that we have seen have been stopped because skilled NCBOE investigators have successfully thwarted these attempts.

We all agree that safe, secure, and trustworthy elections are important. However, solutions must actually improve our system rather than throw it into turmoil. Want to improve election integrity? Provide necessary funding and update the outdated SEIMS election software that has been used since the 90's. Want to build trust? Give the NC Board of Elections the ability to educate voters and hire and train staff. Better yet, make voting more accessible and keep early voting options available to voters.

During a recent WUNC interview, NC Senator Paul Newton stated in reference to funding, "We're not going to let that go unaddressed". However, their \$0 proposed budget increase for NCBOE over the next two years says otherwise. Even the House budget of just \$3.5 million a year for two years doesn't begin to cover the \$13 million SEIMS election software and campaign finance reporting systems that need to be updated.

If those in power in state government truly care about improving election integrity, they will cease creating needless obstacles for voters, fully fund the North Carolina Board of Elections, and give county boards the resources they need.

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