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Short Title: Absentee Voting Improvements.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 17, 2009

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ABSENTEE VOTING LAWS,
ESPECIALLY TO IMPROVE THE ABILITY OF MILITARY AND OVERSEAS
VOTERS TO CAST TIMELY BALLOTS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 163-248 reads as rewritten:

"§ 163-248. Register, ballots, container-return envelopes, and instruction sheets.

(a) Register of Military Absentee Ballot Applications and Ballots Issued. – The State Board of Elections shall ~~furnish the chairman of the board of elections in each county of the State with a book to be called the~~ approve an official register of military absentee ballot applications and ballots issued in which shall be recorded whatever information and official action may be required by this Article. ~~In lieu of furnishing this register, the State Board of Elections may provide for a separate military section in the register furnished under the provisions of G.S. 163-228 which shall be used for the same purpose. The State Board of Elections may provide for the register to be kept by electronic data processing equipment, and a copy or a supplement of new information shall be printed each business day.~~

The register of military absentee ballot applications and ballots ~~issued, whether contained in a separate book or maintained as a separate part of the register furnished under the provisions of G.S. 163-228, issued~~ shall constitute a public record and shall be opened to the inspection of ~~any registered voter of the county at any time.~~ record.

(b) Absentee Ballot Form. – Persons entitled to vote by absentee ballot under the terms of this Article shall be furnished with regular official ballots; separate or distinctly marked absentee ballots shall not be used. The State Board of Elections and the county boards of elections shall have all necessary absentee ballots printed and in the hands of the proper election officials not later than 60 days before the statewide general election in even-numbered years and not later than 50 days before the primary or any other election. However, in the case of municipal elections, absentee ballots shall be made available no later than 30 days before an election.

(c) Container-Return Envelope. – The county board of elections shall print a sufficient number of envelopes in which persons casting military absentee ballots may transmit their marked ballots to the chairman of the county board of elections. The container-return envelopes shall be printed and available for use not later than 60 days before the statewide general election in even-numbered years and not later than 50 days before the primary or any other election. However, in the case of municipal elections, container-return envelopes shall be made



1 available no later than 30 days before an election. Each container-return envelope shall be
2 printed in accordance with the following instructions:

- 3 (1) On one side shall be arranged identified spaces in which the chairman of the
4 county board of elections may insert the name of the applicant, the number
5 assigned his application, and the designation of the precinct in which ~~his~~
6 ~~ballots are to be voted.~~ the applicant is registered.
- 7 (2) On the other side shall be printed the return address of the chairman of the
8 county board of elections and the following certificate:

9
10 **"CERTIFICATE OF ABSENTEE VOTER**

11
12 I, _____, do hereby certify that I am a resident and qualified
13 voter in _____ precinct, _____ County, North Carolina, and that I am
14 [check whichever of the following statements is correct]

- 15 Serving in the armed forces of the United States
- 16 The spouse of a member of the armed forces of the United States residing outside the county
17 of my spouse's residence
- 18 A disabled war veteran in a United States government hospital
- 19 A civilian attached to and serving outside the United States with the armed forces of the
20 United States
- 21 A member of the Peace Corps
- 22 A United States citizen currently outside the United States

23 I further certify that I am affiliated with the _____ Party. [To be completed only if
24 applicant seeks to vote in the primary of the political party to which he belongs.]

25 I further certify that the following is my official address:

26 _____
27 [Unit (Co., Sq., Trp., Bn., etc.), Governmental Agency, or Office]

28 _____
29 [Military Base, Station, Camp, Fort, Ship, Airfield, etc.]

30 _____
31 [Street number, APO, or FPO number]

32 _____
33 [City, postal zone, State, and zip code]

34 _____
35 [E-mail address]

36 I further certify that I made application for absentee ballots and that I marked the ballots
37 enclosed herein, or that they were marked for me in my presence and according to my
38 instruction. I understand it is a felony to falsely sign this certificate.

39 Witness my hand in the presence of _____ [Insert ~~names~~ name and ~~addresses~~
40 ~~address of witnesses~~ witness] this _____ day of _____, _____.

41 _____
42 (Signature of voter)

43 Signature of witness # 1 _____

44 Address of witness # 1 _____

45 ~~Signature of witness # 2~~ _____

46 ~~Address of witness # 2~~ _____

47 Note: This certificate must be witnessed by ~~any two persons who are~~ a person who is 18 years
48 of age or older, and must contain their signatures and addresses. ~~the signature and address of~~
49 the witness."

50 (d) Instruction Sheets. – The county board of elections shall prepare and print a
51 sufficient number of sheets of instructions on how voters covered by the provisions of this

1 Article are to prepare absentee ballots and return them to the chairman of the county board of
2 elections. The instruction sheets shall be printed and available for use not later than ~~60 days~~
3 ~~before the primary or election~~ the date of ballot availability."

4 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 163-227.3(a) reads as rewritten:

5 "(a) A board of elections shall provide absentee ballots of the kinds needed 60 days prior
6 to the statewide general election in even-numbered years and 50 days prior to the date on which
7 ~~the any other election shall be conducted~~ conducted, unless 45 days is authorized by the State
8 Board of Elections under G.S. 163-22(k) or there shall exist an appeal before the State Board or
9 the courts not concluded, in which case the board shall provide the ballots as quickly as
10 possible upon the conclusion of such an appeal. However, in the case of municipal elections,
11 absentee ballots shall be made available no later than 30 days before an election. In every
12 instance the board of elections shall exert every effort to provide absentee ballots, of the kinds
13 needed by the date on which absentee voting is authorized to commence."

14 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 163-228 reads as rewritten:

15 "**§ 163-228. Register of absentee requests, applications, and ballots issued; a public**
16 **record.**

17 The State Board of Elections shall approve an official register in which the county board of
18 elections in each county of the State shall record the following information:

- 19 (1) Name of voter for whom application and ballots are being requested, and, if
20 applicable, the name and address of the voter's near relative or verifiable
21 legal guardian who requested the application and ballots for the voter.
- 22 (2) Number of assigned voter's application when issued.
- 23 (3) Precinct in which applicant is registered.
- 24 (4) Address to which ballots are to be mailed, or, if the voter voted pursuant to
25 G.S. 163-227.2, a notation of that fact.
- 26 ~~(5) Reason assigned for requesting absentee ballots.~~
- 27 (6) Date request for application for ballots is received by the county board of
28 elections.
- 29 (7) The voter's party affiliation.
- 30 (8) The date the ballots were mailed or delivered to the voter.
- 31 (9) Whatever additional information and official action may be required by this
32 Article.

33 The State Board of Elections may provide for the register to be kept by electronic data
34 processing equipment, and a copy shall be printed out each business day or a supplement
35 printed out each business day of new information.

36 The register of absentee requests, applications and ballots issued shall constitute a public
37 record and shall be opened to the inspection of any registered voter of the county ~~at any time~~
38 within 50-60 days before and 30 days after an election in which absentee ballots were
39 authorized, or at any other time when good and sufficient reason may be assigned for its
40 inspection."

41 **SECTION 4.** G.S. 163-229 reads as rewritten:

42 "**§ 163-229. Absentee ballots, applications on container-return envelopes, and instruction**
43 **sheets.**

44 (a) Absentee Ballot Form. – In accordance with the provisions of G.S. 163-230.1,
45 persons entitled to vote by absentee ballot shall be furnished with official ballots.

46 (b) Application on Container-Return Envelope. – In time for use not later than 60 days
47 before a statewide general election in an even-numbered year, and not later than 50 days before
48 a statewide primary, other general election or county bond election, the county board of
49 elections shall print a sufficient number of envelopes in which persons casting absentee ballots
50 may transmit their marked ballots to the county board of elections. However, in the case of
51 municipal elections, sufficient container-return envelopes shall be made available no later than

1 30 days before an election. Each container-return envelope shall have printed on it an
2 application which shall be designed and prescribed by the State Board of Elections, the voter's
3 certification of eligibility to vote the enclosed ballot and of having voted the enclosed ballot in
4 accordance with this Article, a space for identification of the envelope with the voter, and a
5 space for approval by the county board of elections. The envelope shall allow reporting of a
6 change of name as provided by G.S. 163-82.16. The container-return envelope shall be printed
7 in accordance with the instructions of the State Board of Elections.

8 (c) Instruction Sheets. – In time for use not later than 60 days before a statewide general
9 election in an even-numbered year, and not later than 50 days before a statewide primary, other
10 general or county bond election, the county board of elections shall prepare and print a
11 sufficient number of sheets of instructions on how voters are to prepare absentee ballots and
12 return them to the county board of elections. However, in the case of municipal elections,
13 instruction sheets shall be made available no later than 30 days before an election."

14 **SECTION 5.** G.S. 163-230.1(a2) reads as rewritten:

15 "(a2) Delivery of Absentee Ballots and Container-Return Envelope to Applicant. – When
16 the county board of elections receives a request for applications and absentee ballots, the board
17 shall promptly issue and transmit them to the voter in accordance with the following
18 instructions:

- 19 (1) On the top margin of each ballot the applicant is entitled to vote, the chair, a
20 member, officer, or employee of the board of elections shall write or type the
21 words "Absentee Ballot No. ____" or an abbreviation approved by the State
22 Board of Elections and insert in the blank space the number assigned the
23 applicant's application in the register of absentee requests, applications, and
24 ballots issued. That person shall not write, type, or print any other matter
25 upon the ballots transmitted to the absentee voter. Alternatively, the board of
26 elections may cause to be barcoded on the ballot the voter's application
27 number, if that barcoding system is approved by the State Board of
28 Elections.
- 29 (2) The chair, member, officer, or employee of the board of elections shall fold
30 and place the ballots (identified in accordance with the preceding
31 instruction) in a container-return envelope and write or type in the
32 appropriate blanks thereon, in accordance with the terms of G.S. 163-229(b),
33 the absentee voter's name, the absentee voter's application number, and the
34 designation of the precinct in which the voter is registered. If the ballot is
35 barcoded under this section, the envelope may be barcoded rather than
36 having the actual number appear. The person placing the ballots in the
37 envelopes shall leave the container-return envelope holding the ballots
38 unsealed.
- 39 (3) The chair, member, officer, or employee of the board of elections shall then
40 place the unsealed container-return envelope holding the ballots together
41 with printed instructions for voting and returning the ballots, in an envelope
42 addressed to the voter at the post office address stated in the request, seal the
43 envelope, and mail it at the expense of the county board of elections:
44 Provided, that in case of a request received after 5:00 p.m. on the Tuesday
45 before the election under the provisions of subsection (a1) of this section, in
46 lieu of transmitting the ballots to the voter in person or by mail, the chair,
47 member, officer, or employee of the board of elections may deliver the
48 sealed envelope containing the instruction sheet and the container-return
49 envelope holding the ballots to a near relative or verifiable legal guardian of
50 the voter.

1 The county board of elections may receive written requests for applications ~~earlier than 50~~
2 ~~days~~ at anytime prior to the election but shall not mail applications and ballots to the voter or
3 issue applications and ballots in person earlier than 60 days prior to the statewide general
4 election in an even-numbered year, or earlier than 50 days prior to the any other election,
5 except as provided in G.S. 163-227.2. No election official shall issue applications for absentee
6 ballots except in compliance with this Article."

7 **SECTION 6.** G.S. 163-231(a) reads as rewritten:

8 "(a) Procedure for Voting Absentee Ballots. – In the presence of ~~two other persons who~~
9 ~~are~~ a person who is at least 18 years of age, and who ~~are~~ is not disqualified by
10 G.S. 163-226.3(a)(4) or G.S. 163-237(b1), the voter shall:

- 11 (1) Mark the voter's ballots, or cause them to be marked by ~~one of such persons~~
12 that person in the voter's presence according to the voter's instruction;
- 13 (2) Fold each ballot separately, or cause each of them to be folded in the voter's
14 presence;
- 15 (3) Place the folded ballots in the container-return envelope and securely seal it,
16 or have this done in the voter's presence;
- 17 (4) Make the application printed on the container-return envelope according to
18 the provisions of G.S. 163-229(b) and make the certificate printed on the
19 container-return envelope according to the provisions of G.S. 163-229(b).

20 The ~~persons~~ person in whose presence the ballot is marked shall at all times respect the
21 secrecy of the ballot and the privacy of the absentee voter, unless the voter requests ~~their~~ the
22 person's assistance and ~~they are~~ the person is otherwise authorized by law to give assistance.
23 The ~~persons~~ person in whose presence the ballot was marked shall sign the application and
24 certificate as ~~witnesses,~~ a witness and shall indicate ~~their~~ that person's address. When thus
25 executed, the sealed container-return envelope, with the ballots enclosed, shall be transmitted in
26 accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section to the county board of elections
27 which issued the ballots."

28 **SECTION 7.** G.S. 163-250 reads as rewritten:

29 **"§ 163-250. Voting absentee ballots and transmitting them to chairman of county board**
30 **of elections.**

31 (a) Procedure for Voting Absentee Ballots. – In the presence of ~~two persons who are at~~
32 a person who is at least 18 years of age, the voter shall:

- 33 (1) Mark ~~his~~ the voter's ballots, or cause them to be marked by ~~one of such~~
34 ~~persons~~ that person in ~~his~~ the voter's presence according to ~~his~~ the voter's
35 instructions.
- 36 (2) Fold each ballot separately, or cause each of them to be folded in ~~his~~ the
37 voter's presence.
- 38 (3) Place the folded ballots in the container-return envelope and securely seal it,
39 or have this done in ~~his~~ the voter's presence.
- 40 (4) Make and subscribe the certificate printed on the container-return envelope
41 according to the provisions of G.S. 163-248(c).

42 The ~~persons~~ person in whose presence the ballots were marked shall sign the certificate as
43 ~~witnesses,~~ a witness and shall give ~~their addresses~~ that person's address.

44 (b) Transmitting Executed Absentee Ballots to Chairman of County Board of Elections.
45 – When executed and witnessed in accordance with the provisions of subsection (a) of this
46 section, the sealed container-return envelope in which executed absentee ballots have been
47 placed shall be mailed by the voter to the chairman of the county board of elections who issued
48 them."

49 **SECTION 8.(a)** G.S. 163-231(b) reads as rewritten:

50 "(b) Transmitting Executed Absentee Ballots to County Board of Elections. – The sealed
51 container-return envelope in which executed absentee ballots have been placed shall be

transmitted to the county board of elections who issued them as follows: All ballots issued under the provisions of Articles 20 and 21 of this Chapter shall be transmitted by mail or by commercial courier service, at the voter's expense, or delivered in person, or by the voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian not later than 5:00 p.m. on the day before the statewide primary or general election or county bond election. If such ballots are received later than that hour, they shall not be accepted ~~for~~ unless federal law so ~~requires~~ requires, or if (i) ballots issued under Article 20 of this Chapter are postmarked by the day of the statewide primary or general election or county bond election and are received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m. or (ii) ballots issued under Article 21 of this Chapter are received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m. Ballots issued under Article 20 of this Chapter not postmarked by the day of the election shall not be accepted by the county board of elections."

SECTION 8.(b) Chapter 163 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 163-232.1. Certified list of executed absentee ballots received on or after election day; publication of list.

(a) The county board of elections shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, a list in at least triplicate, of all absentee ballots issued under Article 20 of this Chapter returned to the county board of elections to be counted, which have been approved by the county board of elections, have not been included on the certified list prepared pursuant to G.S. 163-232, and which have been postmarked by the day of the statewide primary or general election or county bond election and received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m. The list shall be supplemented with new information each business day following the day of the election until the deadline for receipt of such absentee ballots. At the end of the list, the chairman shall execute the following certificate under oath:

"State of North Carolina

County of _____

I, _____, chairman of the _____ County Board of Elections, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a list of all executed absentee ballots to be voted in the election to be conducted on the _____ day of _____, _____, which have been approved by the county board of elections and which have been postmarked by the day of the statewide primary or general election or county bond election and received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m. I certify that the chairman, member, officer, or employee of the board of elections has not delivered ballots for absentee voting to any person other than the voter, by mail or by commercial courier service or in person, except as provided by law, and have not mailed or delivered ballots when the request for the ballot was received after the deadline provided by law.

This the _____ day of _____, _____

(Signature of chairman of
county board of elections)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this _____ day of _____, _____.

Witness my hand and official seal.

(Signature of officer
administering oath)

(Title of officer)"

(b) The county board of elections shall prepare, or cause to be prepared, a list in at least triplicate, of all military absentee ballots issued under Article 21 of this Chapter and returned to the county board of elections to be counted, which have been approved by the county board of

1 elections, have not been included on the certified list prepared pursuant to G.S. 163-232, and
2 which have been received by the county board of elections not later than three days after the
3 election by 5:00 p.m. The list shall be supplemented with new information each business day
4 following the day of the election until the deadline for receipt of such absentee ballots. At the
5 end of the list, the chairman shall execute the following certificate under oath:

6 "State of North Carolina

7 County of _____

8 I, _____, chairman of the _____ County Board of Elections, do hereby
9 certify that the foregoing is a list of all executed military absentee ballots to be voted in the
10 election to be conducted on the _____ day of _____, _____, which have
11 been approved by the county board of elections, and which have been postmarked by the day of
12 the statewide primary or general election or county bond election and received by the county
13 board of elections not later than three days after the election by 5:00 p.m. I further certify that I
14 have issued ballots to no other persons than those listed herein and further that I have not
15 delivered military absentee ballots to persons other than those listed herein; that this list
16 constitutes the only precinct registration of military absentee voters whose names have not
17 heretofore been entered on the regular registration of the appropriate precinct.

18 This the _____ day of _____, _____

19 _____
20 (Signature of chairman of
21 county board of elections)

22 Sworn to and subscribed before me this _____ day of _____, _____.

23 Witness my hand and official seal.

24 _____
25 (Signature of officer
26 administering oath)

27 _____
28 (Title of officer)"

29 (c) The board shall post one copy of the most current version of each list in the board
30 office in a conspicuous location for public inspection and shall retain one copy until all
31 challenges of absentee ballots have been heard by the county board of elections. The county
32 board of elections shall cause one copy of each of the final lists of executed absentee ballots
33 required under subsection (a) and subsection (b) to be deposited as "first-class" mail to the State
34 Board of Elections no later than 10:00 a.m. of the next business day following the deadline for
35 receipt of such absentee ballots. Challenges shall be made to absentee ballots as provided in
36 G.S. 163-89. In addition the county board of elections shall, upon request, provide a copy of
37 each of the lists to the chairman of each political party, recognized under the provisions of
38 G.S. 163-96, represented in the county.

39 (d) All lists required by this section shall be retained by the county board of elections
40 for a period of 22 months after which they may then be destroyed."

41 **SECTION 8.(c)** G.S. 163-89(a) reads as rewritten:

42 "(a) Time for Challenge. – The absentee ballot of any voter may be challenged on the
43 day of any statewide primary or general election or county bond election beginning no earlier
44 than noon and ending no later than 5:00 P.M., or by the chief judge at the time of closing of the
45 polls as provided in G.S. 163-232 and G.S. 163-251(b). The absentee ballot of any voter
46 received by the county board of elections pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) may be
47 challenged no earlier than noon on the day following the election and no later than 5:00 p.m. on
48 the next business day following the deadline for receipt of such absentee ballots."

49 **SECTION 8.(d)** G.S. 163-234 reads as rewritten:

50 **'§ 163-234. Counting absentee ballots by county board of elections.**

1 All absentee ballots returned to the county board of elections in the container-return
2 envelopes shall be retained by the board to be counted by the county board of elections as
3 herein provided.

4 (1) Only those absentee ballots returned to the county board of elections no later
5 than 5:00 p.m. on the day before election day in a properly executed
6 container-return envelope or absentee ballots received pursuant to
7 G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) shall be counted, except to the extent federal law
8 requires otherwise.

9 (2) The county board of elections shall meet at 5:00 p.m. on election day in the
10 board office or other public location in the county courthouse for the purpose
11 of counting all absentee ballots except those which have been challenged
12 before 5:00 p.m. on election ~~day~~ and absentee ballots received pursuant to
13 G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii). Any elector of the county shall be permitted to
14 attend the meeting and allowed to observe the counting process, provided the
15 elector shall not in any manner interfere with the election officials in the
16 discharge of their duties.

17 Provided, that the county board of elections is authorized to begin
18 counting absentee ballots between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. upon
19 the adoption of a resolution at least two weeks prior to the election wherein
20 the hour and place of counting absentee ballots shall be stated. Such
21 resolution may also provide for an additional meeting following the day of
22 the election and prior to the day of canvass to count absentee ballots
23 received pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) as provided in subdivision
24 (10) of this section. A copy of the resolutions shall be published once a week
25 for two weeks prior to the election, in a newspaper having general
26 circulation in the county. Notice may additionally be made on a radio or
27 television station or both, but such notice shall be in addition to the
28 newspaper and other required notice. The count shall be continuous until
29 completed and the members shall not separate or leave the counting place
30 except for unavoidable necessity, except that if the count has been completed
31 prior to the time the polls close, it shall be suspended until that time pending
32 receipt of any additional ballots. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a
33 county board of elections from taking preparatory steps for the count earlier
34 than the times specified in this section, as long as the preparatory steps do
35 not reveal to any individual not engaged in the actual count election results
36 before the times specified in this subdivision for the count to begin. By way
37 of illustration and not limitation, a preparatory step for the count would be
38 the entry of tally cards from direct record electronic voting units into a
39 computer for processing. The board shall not announce the result of the
40 count before 7:30 p.m.

41 (2a) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (2) of this section, a county
42 board of elections may, at each meeting at which it approves absentee ballot
43 applications pursuant to G.S. 163-230.1(c) and (c1), remove those ballots
44 from their envelopes and have them read by an optical scanning machine,
45 without printing the totals on the scanner. The board shall complete the
46 counting of these ballots at the times provided in subdivision (2) of this
47 section. The State Board of Elections shall provide instructions to county
48 boards of elections for executing this procedure, and the instructions shall be
49 designed to ensure the accuracy of the count, the participation of board
50 members of both parties, and the secrecy of the results before election day.

- 1 This subdivision applies only in counties that use optical scan devices to
2 count absentee ballots.
- 3 (3) The counting of absentee ballots shall not commence until a majority and at
4 least one board member of each political party represented on the board is
5 present and that fact is publicly declared and entered in the official minutes
6 of the county board.
- 7 (4) The county board of elections may employ such assistants as deemed
8 necessary to count the absentee ballots, but each board member present shall
9 be responsible for and observe and supervise the opening and tallying of the
10 ballots.
- 11 (5) As each ballot envelope is opened, the board shall cause to be entered into a
12 pollbook designated "Pollbook of Absentee Voters" the name of the absentee
13 voter, or if the pollbook is computer-generated, the board shall check off the
14 name. Preserving secrecy, the ballots shall be placed in the appropriate ballot
15 boxes, at least one of which shall be provided for each type of ballot. The
16 "Pollbook of Absentee Voters" shall also contain the names of all persons
17 who voted under G.S. 163-227.2, but those names may be printed by
18 computer for inclusion in the pollbook.
- 19 After all ballots have been placed in the boxes, the counting process shall
20 begin.
- 21 If one-stop ballots under G.S. 163-227.2 are counted electronically, that
22 count shall commence at the time the polls close. If one-stop ballots are
23 paper ballots counted manually, that count shall commence at the same time
24 as other absentee ballots are counted.
- 25 If a challenge transmitted to the board on canvass day by a chief judge is
26 sustained, the ballots challenged and sustained shall be withdrawn from the
27 appropriate boxes, as provided in G.S. 163-89(e).
- 28 As soon as the absentee ballots have been counted and the names of the
29 absentee voters entered in the pollbook as required herein, the board
30 members and assistants employed to count the absentee ballots shall each
31 sign the pollbook immediately beneath the last absentee voter's name entered
32 therein. The county board of elections shall be responsible for the
33 safekeeping of the pollbook of absentee voters.
- 34 (6) Upon completion of the counting process the board members shall cause the
35 results of the tally to be entered on the absentee abstract prescribed by the
36 State Board of Elections. The abstract shall be signed by the members of the
37 board in attendance and the original mailed immediately to the State Board
38 of Elections. The county board of elections may have a separate count on the
39 abstract for one-stop absentee ballots under G.S. 163-227.2.
- 40 (7) One copy of the absentee abstract shall be retained by the county board of
41 elections and the totals appearing thereon shall be added to the final totals of
42 all votes cast in the county for each office as determined on the official
43 canvass.
- 44 (8) In the event a political party does not have a member of the county board of
45 elections present at the meeting to count absentee ballots due to illness or
46 other cause of the member, the counting shall not commence until the county
47 party chairman of said absent member, or a member of the party's county
48 executive committee, is in attendance. Such person shall act as an official
49 witness to the counting and shall sign the absentee ballot abstract as an
50 "observer."

1 (9) The county board of elections shall retain all container-return envelopes and
2 absentee ballots, in a safe place, for at least four months, and longer if any
3 contest is pending concerning the validity of any ballot.

4 (10) The county board of elections shall meet after election day and prior to the
5 date of canvass to determine where the container-return envelope for
6 absentee ballots received pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) has been
7 properly executed. The county board of elections shall comply with the
8 requirements of G.S. 163-230.1 for approval of applications. Any absentee
9 ballots received pursuant to G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) shall be counted by the
10 county board of elections on the day of canvass. The county board of
11 elections is also authorized to meet following the day of the election and
12 prior to the day of canvass to count absentee ballots received pursuant to
13 G.S. 163-231(b)(i) or (ii) upon the adoption of a resolution pursuant to
14 subdivision (2) of this section. The county board of elections shall comply
15 with all other requirements of this section for the counting of such absentee
16 ballots."

17 **SECTION 9.** Article 21 of Chapter 163 of the General Statutes is amended by
18 adding a new section to read:

19 "**§ 163-258. Emergency powers.**

20 If an international, national, or local emergency or other situation arises that makes
21 substantial compliance with this Article or the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee
22 Voting Act impossible or unreasonable, the State Board of Elections may prescribe, by
23 emergency rule, such special procedures or requirements as may be necessary to facilitate
24 absentee voting by those absent uniformed services voters or overseas voters directly affected
25 who are eligible to vote in this State. The rule shall become effective when filed with the
26 Codifier of Rules."

27 **SECTION 9.1.** G.S. 163-22(k) reads as rewritten:

28 "(k) Notwithstanding the provisions contained in Article 20 or Article 21 of Chapter 163
29 the State Board of Elections shall be authorized, by resolution adopted prior to the printing of
30 the primary ballots, to reduce the time by which absentee ballots are required to be printed and
31 distributed for the primary election from 50 days to 45 days. This authority shall not be
32 authorized for absentee ballots to be voted in the ~~general election~~ general election, except if the
33 law requires ballots to be available for mailing 60 days before the general election, and they are
34 not ready by that date, the State Board of Elections shall allow the counties to mail them out as
35 soon as they are available."

36 **SECTION 10.** This act becomes effective January 1, 2010, and applies with
37 respect to elections held on or after that date.