

Assisting Facility Residents in Exercising Voting Rights

Many of us are eager to increase access to the ballot for residents of healthcare facilities. New rules may be confusing to voters, families, facility staff and volunteers. NCSBE provides voting guides to explain absentee process to most citizens but not facilities. Going to the polls is easy for us yet some residents are transported to polls and others are unable to be transported.

Residents who are unable to go to polls or are unable to independently fill out absentee ballot request need assistance. Only families, guardians or Multiparty Assistance Teams are permitted to assist residents unable to independently request a ballot and later fill it out. MAT assistance is provided only by requesting a team from Buncombe County Board of Elections 250-4200 buncombe county.org or your county BOE.

To identify residents already registered contact your BOE. Voters need to registered by 5pm October 10. Absentee ballot requests are currently available online at BOE site, and at BOE Absentee ballot requests should be received by 5pm October 28, call Board of Elections.after Oct. 28

Requesting MAT assistance early enables BOE to preschedule teams. To better inform residents, facilities might create groups where residents share former voting experiences, invite elected officials and candidates to speak, practice filling out sample requests and ballots, and promote registration. More information may be requested by contacting BOE, Ombudsmen at Land of Sky (info@landofsky.org 251-6200) or by contacting me at abutzner@yahoo.com.

Thank you,
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WOCN

MULTIPARTISAN ASSISTANCE TEAMS

For every primary or election, each county election office will have an assigned Multipartisan Assistance Team (MAT) available to assist voters living in a hospital, clinic, nursing home, or rest home with mail-in absentee voting. MATs are available for voters who need assistance with voting by mail-in absentee ballot, but who do not have a near relative or guardian available to help. If you are a voter as described above, contact your facility's staff to arrange a MAT visit. For more information about MATs, visit the State Board of Elections website or contact your local county board of elections.

ABSENTEE VOTING

Significant changes were made to the method of requesting and returning an absentee ballot by mail. All requests for a civilian absentee ballot must be made on the *State Absentee Ballot Request Form*. Handwritten requests will no longer be accepted. The voter or requestor must provide the voter's date of birth and identification information that can be matched to the voter's record in the list of registered voters. A voter must now vote his or her ballot in the presence of two witnesses. A voter may vote his or her ballot in the presence of one witness only if the witness is a notary public.

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RECEIVING THE BALLOT

If a valid request is received, the county board of elections will mail the voter absentee balloting materials to the address provided on the request form when absentee ballots are available. Absentee ballots are available:

- 50 days prior to the date of the May Primary.
- 60 days prior to the date of the General Election.

The absentee balloting materials will consist of:

- a blank official absentee ballot;
- absentee voting instructions; and
- the *Absentee Application and Certificate* found on the back of the return envelope container.

ABSENTEE VOTING

VOTING AN ABSENTEE BALLOT

In the presence of two witnesses (or one witness if the witness is a notary public), the voter should mark the ballot or cause it to be marked according to his or her instructions. Once the ballot is marked, the voter or a person assisting the voter must seal the ballot in the container-return envelope and must then complete the *Absentee Application and Certificate* on the back of the ballot container-return envelope. The voter's witnesses must complete and sign the envelope in the space designated as *Witnesses' Certification*. If someone assisted the voter, the assister must sign and date the certificate as well.

RETURNING THE BALLOT

Once the *Absentee Application and Certificate* is fully executed with all relevant signatures, the voted ballot (inside the container-return envelope) must be returned to the county board of elections no later than 5:00 p.m. on the date of the election. The envelope may be mailed or delivered in person. Ballots received after 5:00 p.m. on Election Day will be timely ONLY if they are received at the county board of elections by mail bearing a postmark dated on or before the date of the election and are received no later than 5:00 p.m. on the third day following the election.