



## NCRGEA *Government Relations* Update

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May 26, 2020

Week four of the North Carolina Legislature's ongoing short session saw the lawmakers return to Raleigh to tackle new legislation following a brief recess at the end of last week.

Most items of discussions once again revolved around COVID-19 and the problems that it has created for the people of North Carolina. While there has been no precipitous increase in either new cases or of deaths related to the Coronavirus, it has put hundreds of thousands of people out of work across the state and caused severe financial stress.

Proposed legislation discussed on the floor and in committee this week focused on helping people struggling due to this aspect of the pandemic. Debtor protections and additional changes to tax filing and payment deadlines were proposed. The House's Select Committee on COVID-19 also met twice during the week and is nearing the conclusion of its work. Extending the deadline to file new bills in the General Assembly was also discussed.

Concern about the fall elections has been ongoing for some time both in North Carolina and around the country. No one knows for sure what the situation with COVID-19 will be in November but elections are constitutionally mandated and must go on. For this reason, alternatives to traditional voting have been put forward and are being debated throughout the country.

On Friday, four Representatives, Holly Grange (R-New Hanover), Allison Dahle (D-Wake), Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) and Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford), along with 16 co-sponsors of both parties put forward HB 1169 in an attempt to provide some clarity and set ground rules for an election that could be affected if the coronavirus lingers into the fall. Most of the bill concerns absentee ballots which are received and returned by mail. Such ballots have been legal for decades but far more of them are expected in the 2020 election as people stay home to avoid exposure to COVID-19. Since most medical experts expect that new cases will continue for several months, processing high "vote-by-mail" volumes and addressing concerns about fraudulent voting must be addressed.

HB 1169 starts with a requirement for absentee ballots to be accepted and processed by the Board of Elections in each county and makes provisions for assistance to be provided upon request to anyone who needs help filling out their ballot. Section 2 provides that absentee ballots may be requested from county boards via mail, e-mail, or fax. The voter, a close relative, or a legal guardian may make the request. It further charges the DHHS with developing safe and secure methods for delivering ballots to healthcare facilities and nursing homes.

The NC Department of Motor Vehicles will be allowed to renew identification cards either in person or online, and the forms of identification allowed for voting would be expanded to include ID cards from government assistance programs.

HB 1169 passed its first reading in the House before Friday's session was completed.

In the Senate, another election-related bill was offered up, SB 828, which would provide all eligible voters the right to vote by mail with a signature, identical to the manner in which North Carolinians on an overseas military deployment are allowed to vote. This bill was proposed by Sen. Ben Clark (D-Cumberland) with six co-sponsors. It also passed its first reading on Friday.

Both houses of the General Assembly returned to work on Tuesday, May 26. On Tuesday, the Senate Standing Committee on Pensions and Retirement and Aging will meet following the regular session of the Senate.

Stay Tuned!

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