NUMBERED MEMO 2015-01

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Kim Strach, Executive Director
RE: Planning for 2015 … and 2016
DATE: January 16, 2015

We hope your holiday season was restful. As we begin the 2015 calendar year, many offices, including ours, are making plans for the upcoming budget year. Right now, we need to be planning not only for the 2015 municipal election year, but also for the 2016 Presidential election year. With a separate Presidential Preference Primary and rollout of voter ID requirements, we are entering a historic – and very busy – time in elections. We would like to broadly review several matters your office should plan for as you undertake scheduling and budget requests.

In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, there is the potential for SEVERAL election events:

- Municipal elections
- Presidential Preference Primary
- May Primary (5/3/16)
- A possible Second Primary (7/12/16 – if involving a federal contest; 6/21/16 – if otherwise needed)

**Presidential Preference Primary**

The elections omnibus bill (Session Law 2013-381) set the date of the Presidential Preference Primary to immediately follow South Carolina’s first primary if that state’s primary is held before March 15. As South Carolina has historically held its presidential primaries prior to March, it is prudent to plan on the administration of a Presidential Preference Primary.

Based on current indications, two dates that we have heard suggested are February 16 or March 1, 2016. We will keep you informed on this topic as it unfolds. A Presidential Preference Primary in February or March would mean that preparation for that primary — including ballot proofing and absentee voting — could begin in late 2015 and overlap with municipal elections. Please take these demands into consideration as you prepare to budget your time and resources during the final months of 2015. The administration of this primary will have a definite impact on your winter holiday scheduling. Therefore, please review scheduling and availability expectations for this time with your staff, board members and
county manager to keep them informed. Also, these changes affect not only your scheduling of staff but the budgetary needs of your office regarding any potential overtime.

**One-stop Early Voting**

The 2016 election year will require counties to offer the same number of cumulative hours that were offered in the previous presidential election year. For example, the 2016 General Election will require at least the same number of cumulative hours of one-stop voting that was offered in the 2012 General Election. Municipal elections are not mandated to meet the cumulative hours requirement.

For the 2016 primaries, the analysis is not quite as simple. Our office is currently reviewing what the hours requirement may be for the Presidential Preference Primary and the May Primary. In the meantime, it would be wise to err on the side of caution when preparing your budget, which will also ensure that voters receive efficient service at one-stop voting sites. At this point, we would encourage you to plan for hours-matching requirements for both the Presidential Preference Primary and the May Primary. We will provide more detail on this topic in the future, as we continue to receive clarification as to the legal requirements.

In any election with minimum hours requirements, a unanimous County Board of Elections may request a reduction in the number of cumulative one-stop hours. This request is subject to the approval of the State Board of Elections.

Beginning in 2016, Session Law 2013-381 requires that all one-stop voting sites have two election judges not of the same party. Please keep this in mind as you prepare your schedules. You may wish to discuss this additional element with your board members, county officials and county parties as you prepare for the appointment of precinct officials.

As always, we will continue to provide you with more information regarding these issues as the year progresses. However, we encourage you to begin your preparations now in order to be ready for an extremely busy election season.

**Voting Equipment**

Most of the voting equipment in the state is approaching the end of its lifespan. In addition, direct record electronic (DRE) counties should also be prepared for law changes going into effect in 2018 that will require a paper ballot for all certified voting systems. This means currently-certified DRE voting machines will need to be replaced as they will become decertified in January of 2018. Remember that a changeover to a new voting system must be done with the consultation and approval of the State Board of Elections office and must be piloted in at least one precinct prior to the complete changeover.

Counties will need to plan for large expenditures toward the purchase of new voting equipment. The State Board of Elections is developing a formal certification program and will have the guidance of voting systems industry experts and legal counsel to help us through the next wave of voting systems certifications. We will keep you informed about the potential for certification of any new voting equipment. Expenditures for voting equipment will be the responsibility of the counties. Therefore,
planning should begin now so that your county will be ready to purchase new equipment, as needed, by the deadline.

**Precinct Official Training**

Session Law 2013-381 mandates the implementation of the photo identification requirement beginning January 2016. This presents a new challenge regarding the training of precinct officials. In order to meet the mandates set forth in the law, additional precinct official training will need to begin in 2015. This is even more imperative when factoring in the Presidential Preference Primary. These additional trainings need to be considered when having discussions with your county parties regarding precinct official appointments. Prepare for the appointment process now in order to give the county parties ample opportunity to help you find qualified individuals to serve in these positions. These additional trainings will impact your budget needs and should be considered when preparing for budget presentations.

**Training Conferences**

The upcoming 2015-2016 fiscal year will include three training conferences. The first conference will be the 2015 statewide training conference held on August 12-13, 2015 in Winston-Salem. We have been working on a website for this conference and hope to make it live by the end of January. The second conference will be the School of Government’s Election Directors conference held December 7-8, 2015 at the Sheraton Imperial RTP in Durham. The third conference will be the 2016 spring statewide training conference; the dates and location for this conference have not been set at this time. We will provide that information as soon as it becomes available. As a reminder, the statewide training conferences are mandatory for all directors and board members as set out in NCGS §163-82.24.

Please keep these conferences in mind as you prepare your budgets and schedules. There will be important information shared at all of these conferences. Remember these dates as new county board members are appointed in the summer of 2015.

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Finally, please note that any of these topics could be revisited by the General Assembly, which begins a new session this week. We will update you on any elections legislative action. There is a lot to think about here, but we did want to keep all of these areas on your radar as you begin your budgetary preparations and planning for the upcoming elections. We are more than happy to assist you in any way possible.

Here’s hoping for a successful year. As always, thank you for all that you do.