



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Numbered Memo 2019-05

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director
RE: Emergency Preparations for Hurricane Dorian
DATE: September 3, 2019

As Hurricane Dorian approaches, we are mindful of the possible impact on you, particularly since county boards of elections have ongoing elections in CD3, CD9, and Charlotte. This office is providing additional information to you, including information about emergency powers, and will remain in communication with you throughout the week. We know that each county board of elections is unique, and that you, as county elections officials, have the on-the-ground information about how your county is being impacted. As detailed below, please keep us apprised as you know more about any impacts of the storm to you and your voters.

- **Expected conditions.** Tropical storm watches have been issued for portions of southeastern North Carolina. Current forecasts show that the greatest impacts are expected late Wednesday night into Friday for coastal North Carolina. Significant impacts are becoming more likely across portions of eastern North Carolina including life-threatening storm surge late Wednesday night to Friday, heavy rainfall amounts of 5-10", with locally higher amounts up to 15", and tropical storm force winds likely across eastern parts of the state. Lesser impacts are expected further inland. Evacuation orders are in place for certain areas. Some county governments will have their offices closed towards the end of the week.
- **Safety.** Safety is always our top priority for county boards of elections staff, elections officials, and voters. If your county government offices will be closed due to the impact of the storm, this means that your county has determined it is not safe for the county to be open. Due to the need to protect elections officials and voters, your board may find it necessary to determine whether a one-stop site or sites should also be closed. Because the county board of elections, not county commissioners, establish one-stop sites for the county, your county board of elections will need to make the determination about any modifications to its adopted plan. If possible, you should update your website and office voicemail with information about any closures. You should also communicate this

information to the county parties and any other stakeholders who have asked to receive information.

- **Board meetings.** Should your board need to meet to address a weather-related issue, a quorum of three members must be present. A majority of members present must vote for an action for the motion to pass. An exception to this general rule involves county board actions regarding one-stop plans. To adopt a plan or make changes to it, a county board must have a unanimous vote of all its appointed members. Your county board is expected to work collaboratively to serve the voters in the county, and this includes ensuring both their safety and access to voting.

Ordinarily, a meeting must be noticed at least 48 hours in advance, but a meeting may be called with less than 48 hours' notice if an emergency arises that the board must address. Only business connected with the emergency may be considered at the meeting, and the notice provisions of [G.S. § 143-318.12\(b\)\(3\)](#), including notice to members of the media, must be followed. A meeting may be conducted telephonically provided the public is given access to listen to the meeting, which may be accomplished by providing a call-in number.

- **Emergency plans.** County boards of elections should review their emergency plans and update them as needed, including any delegation of emergency powers to the director. Please also make sure a comprehensive communication plan with appropriate contact numbers are included with your emergency plan. Please provide via helpdesk ticket the telephone numbers and email addresses of key office staff, board members and essential county government staff.
- **Emergency contact information.** Please put in a helpdesk ticket with updated information about how to contact you in the event of an emergency. This includes telephone and email contacts for the director and chair of the county boards of elections. All counties should provide this information, even if they do not anticipate an impact from the hurricane. This information should also be exchanged among county board members and the director.
- **Emergency powers.** Pursuant to [G.S. § 163A-750](#), the Executive Director of the State Board of Elections may exercise emergency powers to conduct an election in districts where the normal schedule has been disrupted by a natural disaster or extremely inclement weather. Last year, the agency adopted standards in [08 NCAC 01 .0106](#) that require consideration of a specific list of factors when emergency powers are exercised, such that any remedy is tailored to the nature and scope of the disruption. Should your county board of elections become aware of a need for these powers to be exercised,

please let the State Board know via a helpdesk ticket and by my contact information provided to you by email.

Remedies may include additional hours or days of early voting, extension of when absentee ballots may be received, or other tailored solutions that cannot be exercised at this current time. We are mindful of the need to balance voter access to the polls with the practical ability of a county to administer elections in the wake of a disruptive hurricane, when voting sites may become unusable and precinct officials may be unavailable.

- **Absentee requests.** Today is the deadline for county boards of elections to process absentee requests for the September 10 election. It is imperative that you process all requests by the end of the day to make sure that voters timely receive their absentee ballots. And remind voters who mail their ballot at the last minute to take it to the post office and request that it be postmarked to ensure that ballots mailed by Election Day will be counted.

For the October 8 election, your office should go ahead and mail ballots to voters who have requested them if you anticipate your office will be closed on Friday.

- **Polling places and precinct officials.** You should continue to survey your polling places and precincts officials and have a way to communicate with pollworkers. Be aware of the status of your emergency backup polling place locations and whether you could relocate them in the event that becomes necessary.

County boards should ensure they are able to monitor their county email in order to respond quickly to any action that may need to be taken. They should also maintain open lines of communication with county emergency management officials.

Additional Guidance Provided to County Boards of Elections on Sunday, September 1, 2019

FOR ALL NC COUNTY BOARDS OF ELECTIONS

- Hurricane Dorian's reach may impact large portions of our state with rain and wind even if there is no actual landfall.
- The residual effects of the hurricane, such as flooding, may occur days after the initial impact.
- All counties should consider the impact that flooding or wind damage may have on their operations and be in communication with local emergency officials.
- Please share your emergency preparations with the SBE Helpdesk (HelpRequest.SBOE@ncsbe.gov) now and as you implement any steps this week while we all have power and ease of communication. Having your emergency plans, including phone numbers, will allow the SBE to be in communication or help facilitate communication in the event of an emergency.
- Please consider taking these precautionary measures as well:
 - Elevate all computers
 - Empty the lower two drawers in your filing cabinets (5 foot of flood water)
 - Shut down all electronics
- If you anticipate being without power for a short time (less than 48 hours) please follow these steps:
 - Contact SBE helpdesk and request a SEIMS full backup to disk. This will prevent partial day loss of data since the SEIMS servers are backed up nightly.
 - Once backup is completed SBE will notify CBE to remove the SEIMS USB backup drive and label it.
 - CBE must then take USB to secure offsite location for storage.
 - Once emergency is over, if needed the USB drive can be used to recover the SEIMS server if the SEIMS server is damaged or inoperable.
- If you are preparing for a disaster or major outage (longer than 48 hours) please follow these steps:
 - Contact SBE helpdesk and request a SEIMS full backup to disk. This will prevent partial day loss of data since the SEIMS servers are backed up nightly.
 - Once backup is completed SBE will notify CBE to remove the SEIMS USB backup drive and label it.
 - CBE must then take USB to secure offsite location for storage.
 - If applicable/available CBE must also take the SEIMS server to secure offsite location for storage.
 - Once emergency is over return SEIMS server to office and continue normal operations. If needed the USB drive can be used to recover the SEIMS server if the SEIMS server is damaged or inoperable.

- If you have a disaster and the SEIMS server or SEIMS USB drives are missing, damaged or inoperable, then take the following steps:
 - Contact SBE helpdesk and advise them of the above.
 - SBE will bring a virtual CBE server online for the county.
 - SBE will allow firewall access for current CBE location, if different than original location.
 - SBE will provide instructions on how to connect to SBE county SEIMS server from current location.
 - CBE will connect with SEIMS applications on county workstations and resume normal operations.

FOR COUNTY BOARDS OF ELECTIONS CONDUCTING SPECIAL ELECTIONS IN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS 3 & 9

- Detailed steps for preparing ATV labels and other emergency preparations to continue operations to conduct the election will be sent on Tuesday.
- Please implement these steps quickly while support vendors or businesses are still able to assist and while power and other utilities are available.
- It is particularly important for you to be in contact at this time with your emergency management officials as they may not be aware that you are conducting early voting currently. Work with these officials to consider continuity of operations for your one-stop early voting sites, your office, your storage facilities, and your election day polling places.
- A press release will be provided to the media reminding voters of the option to vote in-person at the one-stop early voting sites as part of their preparations for the hurricane. We should be mindful that mail service may be impacted by the storm and residual effects may impact polling sites and Election Day operations. You may see an increase in early voting this week.