

Democracy North Carolina

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BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT ON S68 – REWRITE OF ELECTION BOARDS

Background

The General Assembly passed [another bill \(S68\)](#) to combine regulation of ethics, elections and lobbying under one agency – which in itself may have merits. See [article here](#). But GOP lawmakers manipulated the makeup of the state and local boards to give Republicans control over all decisions:

- A Republican chair is required in even-numbered years for county boards and in presidential years for the State Board of Elections.
- The new State Board of Elections cannot hire a new executive director until May 2019 (section 17 of the ratified bill); until then, the director must be Kim Strach, who was hired by Gov. Pat McCrory's appointees and who is married to prominent Republican attorney Phil Strach, who is defending the GOP on redistricting matters.
- Board members are nominated through the parties (as under current law); but an even number from each major party must serve on the county boards (2 Democrats, 2 Republicans) and the State Board (4 each), instead of a majority of the 3-member county boards and 5-member State Board coming from the governor's party.
- Decisions require at least 5 votes at the State Board and 3 votes at the county boards, which gives each party veto power.
- Instead of the current clear path for making decisions, deadlocked decisions can tie up everything – moving a polling place, deciding early voting plans, hearing a voter's eligibility challenge, investigating violations of campaign finance law, etc.
- No new money is appropriated to fund the combined agencies, which separately were already overwhelmed with their workloads. The backlog and mistakes by overworked local and state personnel will harm voters' confidence in the integrity of elections and ethics oversight.
- County board of elections members from both parties oppose the rewrite – see statement below.

Statement by Bob Hall, Democracy North Carolina

“Republican lawmakers glossed the rewritten bill with new language about protecting free speech and the First Amendment, but it's an arrogant move to manipulate the elections process to ensure that one political party can get its way or grind everything to a halt. This is the same nasty approach of “win it or wreck it” that Gov. Pat McCrory and his allies used to jam up the November election. Fair-minded Republican elections officials rejected that effort, and they are opposing this bill, too. Hundreds of county elections officials told Rep. David Lewis' staff member this week* that the bill is unworkable. It should be vetoed and partisan extremists in the legislature should stop their madness.”

- Bob Hall, Executive Director, Democracy North Carolina, Direct line: 919-489-1931

** On Tuesday, Rep. Lewis' staffer Greg Gebhardt attended the convention in Wilmington of board members of county BOEs. He asked for a show of hands of who thought S68 was workable. Only about 12 hands went up out of 300 board members and directors. They gave him an earful. Gebhardt was urged to ask for the audience response by Yadkin County board member Walter Shore - 336-244-0527.*