

NC Auditor's Former Elections Liaison Resigns After Early Voting Controversy

Dallas Woodhouse, the North Carolina auditor's liaison to county boards of elections, has resigned following controversy over his involvement in local early voting plans, including communications with election officials in Anson County. His resignation came after public records revealed he had urged several county election boards to reconsider or revise their early voting schedules.

The issue stems from legislation approved late last year that transferred the governor's authority to appoint members and chairs of county boards of elections and the State Board of Elections to State Auditor Dave Boliek. The change shifted county election boards from Democratic to Republican majorities. While the auditor's office has appointment authority and budget oversight, county election boards continue to make their own decisions on election administration.

Anson County Anson County became one of several counties at the center of the debate after its Board of Elections approved an early voting plan on June 9. Election Director Neva Helms presented three options to the board, including one based on a proposal Woodhouse had previously sent to county officials. The Republican majority instead approved a plan that eliminated nearly all weekend voting except for the final Saturday required by state law. Because the vote was not unanimous, the plan was forwarded to the State Board of Elections for final consideration.

The following day, Woodhouse texted Helms and Board Chair Kelly Newton, saying, "We are going to have to redo that early voting plan," adding that neither Republican members of the State Board of Elections nor his office believed such a large reduction in early voting hours would be approved. When Newton questioned why the plan needed to change if it met legal requirements, Woodhouse responded that he believed the State Board would reject it. He later suggested using additional funds in the county's budget to reconsider the plan and encouraged board members to work toward a unanimous agreement.

According to the records, Woodhouse also suggested a compromise in which additional Saturday voting hours would be offered in exchange for support of a unanimous plan without Sunday voting. He later reminded county officials to revise the plan before the board's July 14 meeting, where reconsideration was placed on the agenda.

Anson County was not the only county contacted by Woodhouse or representatives of the auditor's office. Public records show election officials in several counties, including Columbus, Cabarrus, Alamance, Granville, Randolph and Pasquotank, also received recommendations or suggestions regarding early voting sites or schedules. In several cases, local boards declined to follow the recommendations, and a number of disputed plans have been forwarded to the State Board of Elections for final decisions.

Woodhouse resigned effective July 13. In his resignation letter, he acknowledged that decisions involving early voting are among the most challenging issues facing county election officials because every county has different needs and circumstances. He said there were recommendations he would make differently in hindsight and that he could have been more precise in some of his communications. He maintained that his recommendations were made honestly and with the goal of helping county boards follow the law while improving voter access and public confidence in elections.

The State Board of Elections emphasized that its staff does not recommend one early voting plan over another. Spokesman Pat Gannon said elected officials, candidates, political parties, advocacy organizations and private citizens are free to offer suggestions, but State Board staff limits its role to advising counties on complying with state law and providing fair voter access within available resources.

The controversy comes as early voting continues to be the subject of debate across North Carolina. Most disagreements this year have involved whether counties should offer additional Saturday or Sunday voting hours, the number of voting sites and their locations. Under state law, county boards attempt to adopt unanimous early voting plans whenever possible. If they cannot agree, the State Board of Elections makes the final decision.

The General Assembly is also considering legislation that could shorten North Carolina's early voting period from the current 17 days. Supporters say a shorter period could reduce costs, while opponents argue early voting has become the preferred method for many voters. During the 2024 election, nearly three-fourths of North Carolina voters cast their ballots before Election Day. *By Sarah Michels, Carolina Public Press. Carolina Public Press is an independent, in-depth and investigative nonprofit news service for North Carolina.*

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