

GRAHAM COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Juanita Colvard, Chairwoman
Keith Rogers, Vice Chair
Teresa Eller, Secretary
Crisp, Member
Billy Ditmore, Member

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Lowell Teresa Garland, Director
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Date: July 11, 2023

Dear Legislators:

The Graham County Election Boards met on July 10, 2023, for their regularly scheduled meeting and discussed the legislation that is being introduced regarding NC elections. By unanimous decision we decided to submit a letter urging legislators to give this further consideration but given the urgency of legislation moving in the General Assembly, we are reaching out to you now as long-serving county board members. We as Republicans and Democrats together have decades of practical experience in administering elections. Like you, we are committed to ensure that North Carolina voters can have confidence in the security and fairness of our elections.

We encourage each of you to contact your county elections board members and staff to hear their concerns about how legislation would affect the voting process in our state. Some of the current proposals, if implemented, may have unintended consequences that can harm rather than protect the integrity of our elections. For example, House Bill 772 would permit up to 12 partisan observers to “move freely around the voting enclosure” at any time, as well as audio or video record their conversations with poll workers, voter intake paperwork and ballot machines – without capturing images of voters or ballots. As a practical matter, that level of activity would be disruptive, impossible to supervise, and increase rather than reduce voters’ concerns about secure and secret balloting.

Another provision in HB-772 says, “Any election official who restricts or denies observer access” to move around freely and record “is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.” We encourage you to contact your county election staff about the consequences of that provision for recruiting poll workers. Similarly, you may wish to talk with staff about parts of Senate Bill 747 that will significantly increase the number of provisional ballots and require substantial new funding to implement.

Finally, regardless of how the structure of county boards of elections may change under Senate Bill 749, we are committed to fulfill our oaths of office and ensure that our professional staff members administer elections according to the law. Rather than the staff director being hired by county commissioners (whose election the staff must administer), we suggest it’s better for the county board of elections to hire the director we supervise – or, if we are unable to agree on a candidate within 90 days, then allow the county commission to appoint an interim director until we reach a decision.

We greatly appreciate your hard work and public service. We are also both hopeful and thankful for indications that the final budget will include significant funds to modernize SEIMS (the state's election software infrastructure) and support the technical staff who provide vital assistance to county boards across the state. Working together, we can help North Carolinians have confidence and pride in our election system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Juanita Colvard". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Juanita Colvard
Graham County Board of Elections Chair
Keith Rogers, Vice-Chair
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