



MEDIA  
FREEDOM &  
INFORMATION  
ACCESS CLINIC



## Media Access Overview: North Carolina

### Polling Place Access

- During voting, reporters are not permitted to conduct interviews inside the buffer zone around each polling place. The North Carolina Election Official Manual recommends reporters get permission from the person in charge of the polling place before entering the buffer zone. § 163-166.4.
- Buffer zones extend no more than 50 feet from a polling place door and are defined by county boards of elections and publicly disclosed at least 30 days before the election. The county board of elections must also provide an area adjacent to the buffer zone where people or groups may distribute campaign literature, place political advertising, solicit votes, or otherwise engage in election-related activity. § 163-166.4.
- No person may photograph, videotape, or otherwise record the image of any voter within the voting enclosure, except with the permission of both the voter and the chief judge of the precinct. If the voter is a candidate, only the permission of the voter is required. § 163-166.3(b).
- No one may record the image of a voted official ballot. § 163-166.3(c).

### Access to Vote Tabulation Processes

- Any member of the public wishing to witness the vote count at any level may do so. But no witness may interfere with or participate in the official counting of official ballots. § 163-182.2.

### Access to Information/Records

- A list of registered voters is available upon request to the County Board of Elections. The board may also furnish lists of certain categories of voters, such as categories based on party affiliation, gender, race, age, date of registration or precinct name. § 163-82.10(c).
- Voted ballots or paper or electronic records of individual voted ballots are not public except by court order or order of the appropriate board of elections as part of the resolution of an election protest or investigation of an alleged election irregularity or violation. § 163-165.1.
- Each county's list of absentee ballot applications and issued ballots is public record and open to any registered voter of the county from 50 days before an election to 30 days after. § 163-228.
- Election records are public records accessible under the North Carolina Public Records Law § 132.

### Potential Issues

- The statutes do not address photography or recording of the vote counting process, or voting machine maintenance and inspection records.
- The type of voting machine used varies by county. A [county-by-county list](#) is available.

### Key Resources

- [North Carolina Election Official Manual](#)
- [North Carolina State Board of Elections Law Book and Election Law Index](#)
- [North Carolina Sample FOIA Request](#)

Contact the Reporters Committee Legal Hotline at 1-800-336-4243 or [hotline@rcfp.org](mailto:hotline@rcfp.org) if you have questions about reporting on the general election or run into issues while covering the election.