

Democracy North Carolina

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Facts on Senate Bill 325 (Early Voting Bill)

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Senate Bill 325 modifies North Carolina's election statutes to eliminate the final Saturday of the early voting period, require uniform minimum early voting hours, and mandate that county election officials produce annual reports on list maintenance activities. The bill was passed by the full General Assembly on June 15 and subsequently vetoed by the governor; lawmakers have promised to override that veto.

The bill reduces voters' options to cast a ballot.

- The bill eliminates the popular, final Saturday of early voting. In 2016, 193,138 voters cast ballots that day. In 2014, 103,513 voters did so. In 2012, 203,718 North Carolinians voted on that day, and in 2010 79,403.
- This final Saturday is also disproportionately and consistently used by African-American voters, who in 2016 made up 20.6% of voters overall but 28.9% of voters on the last Saturday of early voting. In 2014, African-American voters cast 29.9% of the ballots on the Saturday that would be eliminated. In 2012, they accounted for 32.2% of votes that day, and in 2010 28.5%.
- These effects can be especially large at the county level. For example: in Cumberland County, the state's fifth-largest, the final Saturday accounted for 7.5% of ballots cast during early voting in 2016—and African-American voters cast over half of those ballots.
- The bill requires uniform weekend hours for the two Saturdays and two Sundays and uniform hours (7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.) for all weekdays. Implementing this strenuous weekday schedule will force counties to reduce the number of Early Voting sites and reduce popular weekend hours. The bill provides no additional resources for election officials.

The bill also includes language regarding list maintenance that could be used to justify future purges.

- The bill also includes a requirement that counties report on their list maintenance activity. While this language itself does not change list maintenance requirements, we are concerned that legislators could introduce stricter purging requirements following the Supreme Court's recent ruling on strict Ohio rules in *Husted v. APRI*.

The bill was introduced with no warning and no input from state or county election officials.

- The bill was introduced late on the evening before a morning committee meeting, with no advance notice provided to state or county election officials.
- County election officials were already developing their general election early voting plans at the time the bill was introduced. These new requirements will force them to restart their processes.