



January 12, 2026

Via email

The Honorable Francis X. De Luca
Chair, North Carolina State Board of Elections
PO Box 27255
Raleigh, NC 27611-7255

Re: Early Voting Sites on University and College Campuses

Dear Chair De Luca, Members of the Board, and Executive Director Hayes:

On behalf of the Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project and Voting Rights Project and Common Cause North Carolina, we write to urge the Board to adopt early voting plans on behalf of Guilford and Jackson counties that would retain or include early voting locations on college campuses for the March 3rd Primary election.

On November 18, 2025, and December 9, 2025, respectively, the Guilford and Jackson County Boards of Elections approved non-unanimous early voting plans that do not include early voting sites on several college campuses. The Guilford County plan would not include sites at either NC A&T, the nation's largest HBCU, nor UNC-Greensboro, both of which have been used in several previous elections, and Jackson County's plan would strip Western Carolina University (WCU) of the early voting location that has been available in both primary and general elections during midterm and presidential election cycles alike since its initial adoption in 2016.¹

Concerningly, rather than choosing early voting locations based on what will best serve each county's voting-eligible population, each County Board of Elections has premised removal of these sites in whole or in part on relatively small reductions in turnout at these sites during prior

¹ Lilly Knoepp, *Voting on Campus: The debate on Western Carolina University's polling sites*, NC Local (Dec. 10, 2025), <https://nclocal.org/2025/12/10/western-carolina-campus-voting/>.

election cycles.² Evaluations of early voting sites should focus on making voting more accessible for all voters moving forward instead of focusing only on serving those who have participated in elections in the past. For example, WCU serves over 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students—nearly a quarter of Jackson County’s entire population—and employs dozens if not hundreds of faculty and staff. While it is certainly true that not all of these individuals are North Carolina or Jackson County voters, removing this early voting site makes early voting substantially less accessible for what is likely the single largest voting-eligible population center in the county. Similarly, UNC Greensboro and NC A&T serve nearly 34,000 students combined, in addition to faculty, staff, and community members residing near campus. While cutting these sites may appear to be a cost-cutting opportunity for the county, it comes at a price: it will make voting harder for students, school faculty and staff, and the surrounding community.

Though on-campus voting sites serve more than just a school’s student body, it is important to note that these voting locations address significant barriers to voting for young and student voters who face unique challenges to casting off-campus, in-person ballots that other communities do not. First, college-aged people are some of the least likely to own a car, and many do not have driver’s licenses at all—in 2023, for example, only 60% of 18-year-olds had a driver’s license compared to nearly 90% of those over 35.³ Particularly in rural parts of North Carolina that lack robust public transportation, lacking a driver’s license or access to a car can turn voting off-campus into an extraordinarily time consuming, burdensome task. At WCU, students have reported difficulty merely accessing grocery stores on a regular basis due to lacking transportation, let alone casting their ballot.⁴ This concern is amplified when, for example, a proposed off-campus alternative voting site such as the one proposed by the Jackson County Board of Elections is a nearly one-and-a-half mile walk from campus along a busy road with no sidewalks or crosswalks.

On-campus polling locations, however, do not just benefit student voters. Campus early voting locations provide a centralized place for many residents beyond the school’s student body to vote—they are central, accessible locations for university faculty and staff, as well as residents that live near campus. On-campus voting sites can also often provide crucial infrastructure for

² Amber Lake, Madelyn Ricket, *Students at NC A&T and UNCG resist closure of early voting sites*, WFMY (Nov. 20, 2025), <https://www.wfmynews2.com/article/news/local/uncg-ncat-early-voting-sites-closing-student-protest/83-48b14d66-658f-4b59-97db-f7ee27619f36>Cite to meeting video/minutes; Dave Russell, *Board considers closing WCU early voting primary election site*, The Sylva Herald (Nov. 25, 2025), https://www.thesylvaherald.com/news/article_ad6a73c8-347e-4dff-9439-99b5849a45c3.html.

³ Fed. Hwy. Admin. *Highway Statistics Series 2023*, Table DL-20, U.S. Dep’t. Of Transp. (Jan. 2025), <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2023/dl20.cfm>.

⁴ Evie Grey Corn, *Letter: Closing WCU voting site attacks student access*, Mountain Xpress (Dec. 7, 2025), <https://mountainx.com/opinion/letters/letter-closing-wcu-voting-site-attacks-student-access/>.

accommodating voters with disabilities, such as ample parking and modern ADA-compliant facilities. This reality can make on-campus locations particularly important to voters with disabilities in these counties—this is particularly true during early voting when voters may choose any early voting location in their county to cast their ballot, allowing voters with disabilities to choose a voting location that suits their needs.

The non-unanimous early voting plans put forth by the majorities of Guilford and Jackson County are misguided efforts to save some amount of money at the expense of access to the ballot box for a broad swath of the voting-eligible population, even beyond the student bodies of these institutions. We urge you to approve plans that include these on-campus early voting locations that will make casting a ballot more accessible for many North Carolina voters. We appreciate your consideration of this important matter, and should you have questions or need additional information, please contact Patrick Williamson, Counsel at the Fair Elections Center's Voting Rights Project, at pwilliamson@fairelectionscenter.org.

Sincerely,

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