



DURHAM COUNTY

Board of Elections

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Statement regarding recent media coverage

September 8, 2017

Following recent coverage by *The New York Times* that scrutinized the 2016 Presidential Election and Durham County, the Durham County Board of Elections seeks to correct misapprehensions on several points. The coverage, which centers on speculation over whether North Carolina or Durham County was the target of “Russian hacking,” alleges that Durham County “rebuffed help” from federal officials and an organization called Free & Fair after technical problems arose on Election Day related to electronic poll books.

County officials have found no record of such correspondence. Durham County was not warned about the possibility of hacking prior to the election. County officials did not receive an offer for help from outside entities as stated in the coverage. Many of the allegations contained in the coverage are based on remote hearsay or were otherwise unverified by election officials in North Carolina before the story was published. In response to these concerns, the Durham County Board of Elections, along with the State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement, is respectfully requesting that *The New York Times* retract or correct its coverage unless verifiable evidence is provided (see attached).

The Durham County Board of Elections takes seriously concerns of election interference and is cooperating with State officials in a current, ongoing investigation into the issues that arose in November 2016. Equipment and computers have been turned over to the State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement for independent analysis.

“Neither Durham County or the Durham County Board of Elections, its members or its staff ever was warned prior to the 2016 election of any potential hacking by anyone, including Russia,” said Bill Brian, Chair of the Durham County Board of Elections. Even now, Durham County officials are not aware of any evidence that would suggest a hacking, Russian or otherwise.

Voters can also rest assured that the poll book system is separate from the vote-counting system, and vote counts were verified by recount in 2016. Although technical issues arose on Election Day, in Durham County nearly three-quarters of the county’s participating voters had already cast their ballots by that point, taking advantage of greatly-expanded early voting opportunities in 2016. Going forward, Durham County will be implementing the State-authored electronic poll book on Election Day that has been used during early voting.

Durham County election officials, under the management of new Elections Director Derek Bowens, are working hard to prepare for the 2017 municipal elections. (Mr. Bowens joined the organization in June 2017.) This year’s elections include a City of Durham municipal primary on October 10, 2017 and municipal election on November 7, 2017. [Click here for more information](#), including early voting times and deadlines for registration and absentee voting. Please feel free to contact our staff at elections@dconc.gov or by using the contact information above.

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NORTH CAROLINA

State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement

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September 8, 2017

RE: Your articles on Durham County elections

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to express concerns about recent articles regarding unconfirmed allegations of cyber hacking in Durham County. We appreciate the opportunity to speak with reporter Nicole Perlroth today, but our concerns remain and we respectfully request that your publication correct certain portions of your articles as described below.

Our main concerns center around certain sourcing in "[Russian Election Hacking Efforts, Wider Than Previously Known, Draw Little Scrutiny](#)." In that article, Susan Greenhalgh of Verified Voting provides second-hand quotes from an "Election Protection colleague" in North Carolina:

On Election Day, as the e-poll book problems continued, Ms. Greenhalgh urged an Election Protection colleague in North Carolina to warn the state Board of Elections of a cyberattack and suggest that it call in the F.B.I. and Department of Homeland Security. In an email, she also warned a Homeland Security election specialist of the problems. *Later, the specialist told her Durham County had rejected the agency's help.*

When Ms. Greenhalgh, who works at Verified Voting, a nonprofit dedicated to election integrity, *followed up with the North Carolina colleague, he reported that state officials said they would not require federal help.*

"He said: 'The state does not view this as a problem. There's nothing we can do, so we've moved on to other things,'" Ms. Greenhalgh recalled. "Meanwhile, I'm thinking, 'What could be more important to move on to?'"

First, neither the State nor County Board were ever provided with credible information that hacking was behind Durham County's e-poll book problems prior to June 2017. The leaked intelligence report, which surfaced in June, triggered our concerns about hacking as a possibility since the specific vendor identified in the report provided e-poll book services to Durham County. Consequently, the State Board launched an investigation to determine what happened with the e-poll books. That investigation continues.

Second, the State Board office and the Durham County Board office have no evidence that they were contacted or offered assistance on or around Election Day 2016 by any federal agency related to alleged hacking of e-poll book software. Furthermore, this summer, our agency requested assistance from the Department of Homeland Security and has been consulting with the F.B.I. in connection with the forensic computer aspects of our Durham investigation — and your reporters were aware of those efforts.

The State Board's public information officer, Pat Gannon, spoke with Ms. Greenhalgh and successfully tracked down her "Election Protection colleague," an individual named Trevor Ostbye. In a phone call this week, Mr. Ostbye said he did not recall discussing potential hacking, the F.B.I. or the Department of Homeland Security with anyone from the State or County Boards of Elections on Election Day. He also stated that the quotes from Ms. Greenhalgh were "certainly not taken word for word from anything I wrote or said." We understand also that Mr. Ostbye was not in North Carolina on Election Day.

Although Ms. Greenhalgh says she provided the *Times* with Mr. Ostbye's name, he stated that he was not contacted to corroborate the second-hand quote.

The implication that the State or County Board of Elections rejected federal assistance is unfounded and damaging. We are concerned that the *Times* would quote a source quoting someone else without attempting to verify whether the statements were true. If you have information that was not in the article and would corroborate Ms. Greenhalgh's statements, we would appreciate it if you would let us know.

No reporter from *The New York Times*, to our knowledge and belief, ever asked us whether anyone from the State or County Board was offered federal help in regard to possible hacking on Election Day. Our agency had provided your reporters copies of a letter sent recently to the Department of Homeland Security requesting assistance. We had also told your reporters that DHS has not responded to the letter. The letter was necessary because we had never been offered the help your article claims.

Finally, this is not a minor issue in our state. We are sure you can understand our concerns about claims that either board "rebuffed" federal assistance on such an important issue. The *Times* article was later reprinted by North Carolina's paper of record, *The News & Observer*.

It is more important than ever that the public rely on factual information from such reputable sources at *The New York Times*. We strongly believe that misinformation about elections is particularly harmful and may contribute to the eroding of trust in our election system.

We stand ready to answer any questions that you have about this or any matter pertaining to North Carolina elections.



Kim Westbrook Strach
Executive Director, State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement



Bill Brian
Chair, Durham County Board of Elections