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## IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS REQUEST MILLIONS OF NORTH CAROLINA VOTING RECORDS, PROMPTING STATE PUSHBACK

*Local officials say the move imperils their ability to prepare for the Nov. 6 election*

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RALEIGH, N.C. – Federal immigration officials have requested more than 20 million North Carolina voter records covering eight years as part of the Trump administration’s inquiry into voter fraud, a move local officials said imperiled their ability to prepare for the Nov. 6 election.

The request involves more than 15 million records from the state and 5.6 million individual records from 44 counties with a deadline of Sept. 25, according to the N.C. State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement.

Board lawyer Josh Lawson said in a letter to the Justice Department that the subpoenas faxed to individual county boards “were the most exhaustive on record” and would “materially affect” their ability to prepare for the fall election.

North Carolina has seven million registered voters among its population of 10.2 million, according to the state board.

The Justice Department said in a statement that the investigation was led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, operating under the agency’s newly created Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force. ICE declined to comment and referred questions to a federal prosecutor in North Carolina.

Robert Higdon, the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina, also declined to comment through a spokeswoman.

A federal-law enforcement official said the requests are part of an investigation into voter fraud in which 19 foreigners were charged or indicted last month in North Carolina. The official wouldn’t provide further details.

Wake County Commissioner John Burns, a Democrat, asked Mr. Higdon, a Trump appointee, in a letter to offer an explanation for the subpoenas to avoid the perception that the investigation was a “partisan effort to interfere with the vote.”

Mr. Higdon wouldn’t comment on the request, his spokeswoman said.

The subpoenas cover a range of documents including voter registration application forms, provisional voting forms, poll books and executed in-person and absentee ballots. The state-level request ranges from 2010 to August of this year, while the request to counties extends from 2013 to last month.

The subpoenas would require pulling individual paper documents one by one in some rural counties. Gerry Cohen, former special counsel to the North Carolina legislature and an expert on state election law, said some local officials wouldn’t have the bandwidth to

accomplish that while also trying to hire poll workers, prepare ballots and ensure voting systems are prepared to fend off hackers.

"If the records were turned over, there is no way to hold an election," he said.

In his letter, Mr. Lawson asked the Justice Department to revise the subpoenas and consider extensions for counties due to the administrative strain required. An assistant U.S. attorney responded that requests for extensions would be considered individually, provided they came with a written commitment not to destroy requested documents, according to an exchange provided by the state election board.

President Trump has previously claimed that voter fraud was rampant in the 2016 presidential election and said that an untold number of immigrants voted illegally, helping Hillary Clinton win the popular vote.

A voter integrity commission launched during Mr. Trump's first year in office was closed in January after providing no evidence of widespread fraud. At the time, officials said the panel's work would continue at the Department of Homeland Security, of which ICE is part.

Last month, the Justice Department announced criminal charges against 19 foreigners accused of illegally registering to vote or illegally voting in 2016 in the Eastern District of North Carolina.

The N.C. election board said its own audit of the 2016 election found 41 non-U.S. citizens casting ballots out of 4.7 million total ballots. All were documented noncitizens who entered the state legally, according to the audit.