

Senator Joyce Waddell's January 28, 2016, Newsletter

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*Serving District 40 and
 Mecklenburg County*

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The Waddell Weekly Bulletin

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January 28, 2016

**Dear Friends:**

Happy New Year! It is a new year, new start, and way to go with legislation that improves the lives of North Carolinians. It is your job as citizens to remind legislators of their duty to the public. If you are unsatisfied with the way our state is operated, express your discontent. You have the man-power to create change, but it is up to you to ensure that it is exercised.

The 2016 election primaries will take place on March 15. Please be mindful that you must be registered to vote by February 19. Register to vote by mailing, emailing, or faxing a completed voter registration application to your county board of elections. You may also register to vote in-person at your local Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

A valid photo ID is required to vote in the March primaries. If you are unable to obtain one by the specified deadline, you may vote through the use of a provisional ballot. This requires that you provide: your date of birth and the last four digits of your Social Security number, a document that bears your name and address, or a voter registration card.

Duke Energy supports customers who may need assistance with their power bills or energy efficiency in the midst of the winter cold snap. The company utilizes two programs: Share the Warmth and Duke Energy's Helping Home Fund.

The Share the Warmth program provides heating bill assistance to low income families within Duke Energy's service territory in the Carolinas. The Duke Energy Foundation will match up to \$500,000 customer contributions. Over 80 agencies participate in the distribution of these funds.

The Duke Energy Helping Hand Fund offers free assistance and home energy assessment to help customers save energy bills. It is available to owner- and renter-occupied residences and to apartment dwellings with owner approval. This service may include: health and safety repairs, appliance replacement, heating and cooling system repair, and heating and cooling system replacement. The program is available for Duke Energy customers at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. It is administered by the North Carolina Community Action Association.

To learn more about the Share the Warmth and Duke Energy Helping Hand Fund programs, click the following link:
<http://www.dukeenergy.com/helpinghomefund/default.asp>.

I cannot achieve anything without the support of my constituents. Thank you very much for your continued support! I wish this new year brings joy and happiness to you and your family.

Please continue to refer to the North Carolina General Assembly website www.ncleg.net. You will be able to track legislation, sign up for committee notices and review the citizen's guide.



I encourage you to contact us with your thoughts, comments, or suggestions. Please feel free to have others join in on conversation by sending contact information to joyce.Waddell@ncleg.net.

I look forward to hearing from you!

NC Education Matters



- **Funding for Public Education and Proposed Solutions**

North Carolina currently ranks 43rd in per-pupil spending. The state spent \$855 less per student in 2015 than it did in 2008. Many legislators attribute cuts in spending to the reduction in revenue caused by the recession; however, our state has since recovered and resulted in a budget surplus. The surplus suggests that funds could have been contributed to the education system, particularly since it occurred at a time when tax code changes resulted in a reduction of taxed revenue from previous tax codes. Some solutions to provide additional funds to education include: the expansion of proven programs, such as the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA), and objection to TABOR legislation, which proved damaging to the state economy in Colorado, where it was previously implemented.

- **Incentivizing Educators in North Carolina**

North Carolina ranks last in teacher salary increase, nationally, over the past decade. In the past five years, teacher dissatisfaction has almost doubled, and the number of teachers leaving to teach in other states has tripled. Last year, the state experienced a turnover rate in the field of education of about 15%, a five-year high, leading many educators to move to neighboring states in search of higher pay. Reduction in teacher pay and benefits led to a dramatic decline in the number of college students enrolling in education. For the shadow of the future, these trends could prove disastrous, as over a third of NC educators are products of the UNC system. Role alterations, skill and competency based salaries, and greater salaries to teachers working in high-need schools are some of the proposed solutions to North Carolina's exodus of educators.

- **The Broken A-F Grading System**

North Carolina is one of 15 states to adopt an A-F Public School Grading System. The system analyzes school performance based on student test scores, graduation rates, and preparation for the workforce. 20% of the evaluation measures overall school year-to-year improvement. This scoring system demonstrates strong bias, because school rankings and performance have a strong direct correlation to the socioeconomic status of students. This system currently operates on a 15-point letter grade scale for the school year 2015-2016 then will shift to a 10-point scale. If the 10-point scale was implemented today, 71% of schools would receive D's or F's. A better solution to help North Carolina's struggling schools is to analyze the areas students are scoring well in despite their adversities and replicate the practices as needed.

- **Support Struggling Schools**

North Carolina should implement practices that have proved effective in other areas to help support struggling schools. Currently, "Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools" (TALAS), is an initiative to address poor performance in schools. Although the program was implemented in 2011, 581 schools have received a "low performing" classification, an increase from 367 last year. This number has grown due to the implementation of the A-F Grading System. The TALAS program is currently slated to continue the same practices for the foreseeable future. Several other states utilize "innovation zones," a system that would allow needing districts to be exempt from traditional budget limits in order to improve student performance.

- **Early Childhood Education**

High-quality preschools prove to prepare students well for school and life. Students attending these programs are more likely to attend college, receive employment, stay out of the justice system and become financially stable. North Carolina currently has two major preschool education initiatives: NC Pre-K and Smart Start. These programs received additional funding in the 2015-2017 state budget, but funding is still not comparable to pre-recession levels- with the height being in 2000-2001. 65% of 4th graders are currently not proficient in reading. In order to ensure that this number shrinks in the future, the legislature will need to prioritize funding and advocacy for pre-school and early childhood development programs.

At the General Assembly



Senator Joyce Waddell greets visitors and colleagues as she prepares to attend the Joint Legislative Education Oversight meeting on January 5, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell studies various material for future legislation at the Joint Legislative Education Oversight meeting on January 5, 2016.

In Charlotte, NC



Senator Joyce Waddell discusses legislation about immigrants at the Neighborhood Good Samaritan Center on January 9, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell attends the Democratic Women of Mecklenburg County meeting on January 13, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell speaks about her legislative agenda for the upcoming session on the WGIV Radio Station that aired on January 14, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell presents the Charlotte Root Award to the Honorable Elisa Chinn-Gary, Clerk of Superior Court, at the Martin Luther King Growing the Dream luncheon on January 16, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell pays tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr., and attends the wreath-laying ceremony on January 15, 2016.



Senator Joyce Waddell participates in the Martin Luther King, Jr., parade on January 16, 2016.

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North Carolina.. **BRIEFS:**

From the desk of Senator Joyce Waddell

The new year brings new laws


CHARLOTTE, NC – More than 20 new laws went into effect on New Year's Day, January 1, 2016. Several laws pertain to cars, driving, and taxes. Here is an overview of some of the new legislation:

Internal Revenue Code Update/Motor Fuel Tax Changes: Senate Bill 20 / S.L. 2015-2, reduces the motor fuels tax rate from 36 cents to 35 cents per gallon from January 1st through June 30th. The tax rate will decrease to 34 cents on July 1st. Motorists are able to enjoy the lower pump prices. The first tax reduction took place on April 1, 2015, and reduced the motor fuels tax rate from 37.5 cents to 36 cents. This legislation was signed by the Governor on March 31, 2015.

Increase and Adjust DMV Fees: House Bill 97 / S.L. 2015-241, 2015 Appropriations Act, authorizes an increase of about 30 percent on DMV fees. For example, to renew an 8-year driver's license will cost \$40, due to a \$1 increase for each year the driver's license was issued. Car registration renewals will also rise to \$36, an \$8 increase. The state budget was signed by the Governor on September 18, 2015. To learn more about the new fees, please visit DMV's transactions site at ncdot.gov/dmv.

Taxing Changes: House Bill 97 / S.L. 2015-241, 2015 Appropriations Act, allows a married couple filing jointly to not pay taxes on the first \$15,500 of 2016 income, which is an increase from \$15,000. For instance, a couple who earns \$25,000 would only pay income taxes of \$9,500. The standard deductions for individuals that file income tax will increase by \$250, \$400, \$500, depending on the file status. This legislation is included in the state budget.

"Happy New Year! Please take note of the new laws that are now in effect. It is important to stay updated with new legislation as it may change as time progresses. In this upcoming year, I look forward to continue making a difference for the citizens of North Carolina," said Senator Joyce Waddell.



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North Carolina.. **BRIEFS:**

From the desk of Senator Joyce Waddell

Food Stamp recipient requirements


CHARLOTTE, NC – Food stamp recipients in North Carolina will soon have to prove they are working, volunteering, or taking a class for a minimum of 20 hours a week in order to continue receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, commonly known as food stamps.

This requirement in House Bill 318, Protect North Carolina Workers Act, applies to childless adults under the age of 50. About 115,000 North Carolinian recipients will lose their food assistance benefits after three months for every three years unless they can document work, volunteering, or education activities.

The federal exemption for the state's 23 most urbanized counties, including Mecklenburg County, ended on January 1st. The work and education requirement will be restored statewide beginning on July 1st.

"The loss of food assistant benefits will cause a great hardship on many North Carolina citizens. The economy has not fully recovered from the recession. Barriers, such as health issues or limited education and skills, make it harder for individuals to find employment or secure more hours for work. Others may not have transportation to travel to job opportunities. We must reassert our efforts to protect and help all of the people in North Carolina.

"I voted against this legislation," said Senator Joyce Waddell.



Senator Waddell's office is open Monday through Friday during Session. You may reach her office by calling her Legislative Assistant, Jyrta Moore, at 919-733-5650 or by email at waddelljla@ncleg.net.

All committee meetings and press conferences can be heard on the General Assembly's website at www.ncleg.net. Once on the site, select "**Audio**" and then make your selection: House Chamber; Senate Chamber; Committee Room or Press Conference Room. A schedule of committee meetings and other events is also available on the website.

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