

*****SPAM*** Latest Updates from the NCGA**

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NC Senate District 41 Newsletter

March 12, 2021

Bills Introduced & Co-Sponsored



It has been a busy two weeks at the General Assembly. I want to provide some updates on bills I have introduced and co-sponsored since my last newsletter.

Introduced Bills:

- **[Senate Bill 167](#), The RBG Act** (Remove Barriers and Gain Access to Abortion). I am proud to serve as the primary sponsor on this [important piece of legislation](#) that advocates for reproductive healthcare access, free from politically-motivated, medically-unnecessary barriers. North Carolina has more barriers to access abortion than most other states in the nation. We need the RBG Act to remedy that. [Here](#) is a link to the recording of the virtual press conference for those interested in learning more.
- **[Senate Bill 189](#), School Calendar Flexibility for Mecklenburg County**. I filed this local bill as Chair of the Mecklenburg Delegation to provide school calendar flexibility to CMS, so that mid-term exams can be scheduled prior to winter break and start and end dates can be tailored to what's best for CMS families. It's the same flexibility that charter schools already have.
- **[Senate Bill 190](#), Prohibit Weapons at Polling Places**. The need for this bill was made clear when an [armed man intimidated voters](#) at a Charlotte polling location during the November election, and police had no immediate authority to remove him.
- **[Senate Bill 193](#), Charlotte Citizen's Review Board Subpoena Power**. This bill empowers the CRB to compel witnesses and collect evidence as necessary to perform its oversight functions.

- **[Senate Bill 236, Require Consent/Early Voting/Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.](#)** This bill ensures that students and staff are protected if schools are used as early voting sites.
- **[Senate Bill 242, Save Spring Break Act.](#)** This bill allows CMS to use remote learning when all scheduled make-up days are used up and severe weather or other emergencies force one or more schools to close. It allows remote learning as an alternative to closing one or more schools, so that CMS is not forced to take days away from Spring Break or lengthen the school year in order to make-up that day. I did an [interview with WSOC-TV's Elsa Gillis](#) about the bill today. It airs on tonight's 6pm broadcast.
- **[Senate Bill 243, Design Elements Exempt-Historic Downtown Davidson.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, allows certain design and aesthetic controls for structures along Highway 115 in historic downtown of Davidson.
- **[Senate Bill 244, Davidson Historic District Subdivision Exemption.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, exempts designated historic districts from certain restrictions on zoning in Davidson.
- **[Senate Bill 245, Town of Davidson/Trees Ordinances.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, authorizes the Town of Davidson to adopt ordinances regulating the planting, preservation, and removal of trees. Most municipalities in the state already have this authority.
- **[Senate Bill 246, Davidson/Demolition of Historic Structures.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, authorizes the Town of Davidson to adopt ordinances regulating the demolition of historic structures in the town's historic districts.
- **[Senate Bill 251, Cain Center for the Arts Funds.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, provides funding to help build the regional art center.
- **[Senate Bill 252, Cornelius Affordable Housing Funds.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, provides funds to develop a comprehensive affordable housing plan for Cornelius.
- **[Senate Bill 253, Town of Cornelius-Extend Vacation Rental Regulations.](#)** This local bill, requested by the Board, extends the sunset of the Town's authority to regulate vacation rentals.
- **[Senate Bill 273, Charlotte Firefighters' Retirement System Act.](#)** This bill, requested by Charlotte, permits the city to contribute more into the firefighters' retirement fund.
- **[Senate Bill 287, Delay CMS Board Election/Census Delay.](#)** This bill, requested by CMS, will delay the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board Elections if the census data is not available in time to redraw constitutionally valid districts.

Co-Sponsored Bills:

- **[Senate Bill 165, North Carolina CROWN Act,](#)** which would prohibit race-based hair discrimination in the workplace.
- **[Senate Bill 168, Historic School Preservation Grant Funds,](#)** which protects historic schools such as the Rosenwald Schools in Mecklenburg County.
- **[Senate Bill 178, Reenact Child Care Tax Credit](#)**
- **[Senate Bill 180, Restricted Driver's License for Undocumented Immigrants,](#)** which will allow undocumented immigrants in North Carolina to get a restricted driver's license.
- **[Senate Bill 181, Reinstate Earned Income Tax Credit](#)**
- **[Senate Bill 182, Restore Educational Sales Tax Holiday](#)**
- **[Senate Bill 199, Freedom from Abuse.](#)** This bipartisan bill requires schools to provide resources about child abuse and neglect and how to seek help.
- **[Senate Bill 231, Military Family Sports Act.](#)** This bipartisan bill allows children of military families to participate in interscholastic athletics if they enroll at the school mid-semester.
- **[Senate Bill 259, Additional Magistrates to Mecklenburg County](#)**
- **[Senate Bill 267, Lake Norman Watercraft Safety.](#)** This bill requires that one wear a life jacket on water skis, wave board or similar device.
- **[Senate Bill 274, Restore Master's Pay for Teachers & Instructional Support Personnel,](#)** which returns the additional pay educators with master's degrees used to earn when teaching in NC public schools

If you have any questions about or would like to help support any of these bills, feel free to contact me at Natasha.Marcus@ncleg.gov.

COVID-19 Economic Relief Updates





Last week, the North Carolina Senate passed [S172/H196](#), 2021 COVID-19 Response & Relief which provides \$1.7 billion in relief for the state from federal relief funds. The bill includes [many good things](#) and passed unanimously. However, it was rushed through and Democrats were not consulted on any specifics. Therefore, it left out some important things and creates some problems. I raised my concerns on the Senate floor -- these are the topics I spoke about:

- The Senate version **removed the extension of the statute of limitations on child sexual abuse claims**. Civil courts were essentially out of reach for a year due to the pandemic. The extension that the House included would have simply added the year that was lost, so those victims can get their justice. We should have kept that extension in the bill.
- Within the DHHS Child Care Block Grant funds, the House made a change to the bill to allow hazard pay bonuses for childcare workers, but the Senate majority removed it . **Why are we so hard on childcare workers, some of the worst paid essential workers in the State?** Their average wage is \$12/hour statewide (much less in many counties), even though many have degrees in early education. Working parents rely on having safe childcare. We have the funds to pay these workers better and we should. More information on my remarks regarding childcare workers can be found [here](#).
- The bill provides **no hazard bonus pay for K-12 Educators** who are literally putting their health at risk in order to return to in-person instruction, as required by their LEAs. More information on my remarks regarding teacher pay can be found [here](#).
- The bill strays from the focus of a COVID relief bill to **increase enrollment at the State's two D-Grade virtual charter schools**, without any indication that they are improving. At a time when NCGA leadership has had harsh words for virtual learning options, why are we expanding enrollment in failing virtual charter schools?
- **Changes to the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program will slow down the program, make it less efficient**, result in more frustration for renters and landlords, and will cause some counties to have insufficient funds to meet the need, while others have too much which will revert back to the US Treasury. DPS is currently providing rental assistance with these funds. We should not change the whole system in the middle of the pandemic. This is the NCGA trying to wrestle control of a program because of politics and I'm concerned for all the folks who need help, not political fights over control.
- This bill ignores the fact that **NC remains among the worst states for unemployment benefits**. I hear frequently from constituents who are struggling and cannot find a job. Jobs are coming back, but we're not where we were before the pandemic hit. We should use some the funds at our disposal, which is the taxpayers' money that we are empowered to appropriate, to help people who are struggling without their income.
- **I hope that in the future, leadership will not exclude our Democratic caucus from the drafting process on bills of this importance**. My colleagues and I would have liked the opportunity to raise these concerns when there was time and opportunity to address them.

(Note that when speaking into a microphone on the Senate floor, members remove masks so everyone can hear.)

A Call to Return to Safe, In-Person Learning



Over the past few months, I have heard from constituents about their frustrations with remote learning and the desire to return to in-person instruction. I've also heard from constituents who prefer remote-only and/or a slower change while covid cases remain above 5% in Mecklenburg County.

Over the past few weeks, there has been a **tug of war in Raleigh about who should decide when and how schools reopen**. Republicans offered [Senate Bill 37](#), but that was unsuccessful because it didn't follow CDC and DHHS safety guidelines and did not include a safety switch to reverse course if outbreaks happen. Senate Democrats held firm in rejecting S37 and laid out in a [letter to the NC State Board of Education](#) what we wanted to see in a school reopening plan.

In the end, **we were able to reach a compromise, SB220**, which passed unanimously through the House and Senate this week. It keeps the full-remote option for families who want that and requires all districts to offer in-person classes to those who want that option, following all safety guidelines. It has a safety provision in case we experience unexpected spikes. SB220 was a rare example of bipartisan compromise and ultimately puts NC in a good position to move forward safely.

More Information about SB220 Here

I-77 Updates



I recently requested an update on the **status of the project to harden the shoulders along I-77**. This project, referred to as "Peak Period Shoulder Use," allows vehicles to use the shoulder space to travel between interchanges during the busiest hours of the day. Unfortunately, this project was paused (like many others across the state) during the financial challenges of 2019 and 2020. The Department of Transportation expects to be able to reinstate the initial traffic piece in the coming months.

NCDOT assessed **significant late fees against I-77 Mobility Partners** for its failures to complete the toll lanes on time. Although most of the work is complete now, DOT is still working through contract closeout items and has not reached settlement on the liquidated damages, claims and certifications. DOT expects to have resolution in the coming months.

Additionally, the companies that built & operate the I-77 toll lanes are **allegedly not paying their debts** to local subcontractors. Lawsuits have been filed. Could this be the opening we need to end the foreign ownership of our major highway? I'll be following the lawsuits closely.

Meeting with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators

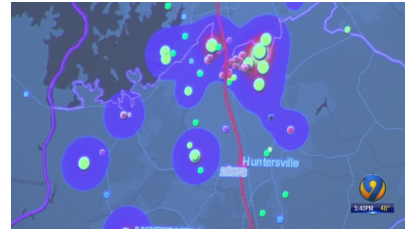


One of the main responsibilities of representing Mecklenburg County in the NCGA is **seeking policy changes that improve public education** by giving CMS calendar flexibility, budget flexibility, school safety legislation, sufficient funding and more. Last weekend, the delegation had a check-in with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators to discuss their priorities and our work. Thank you to the 30+ local educators, county commissioners, and school board members who joined us.

We also announced a new initiative I'm launching: a pool of local educators who are willing to advise us on policy. If you are a CMS educator and are willing to share your opinions with us, **please join the Education Advisors** by sending your name and school to me at Natasha.Marcus@ncleg.gov.

Funds for Ocular Melanoma Expert Research

Thank you to the Lake Norman Citizen for **highlighting the work I am doing** to get state funding to hire experts to research the ocular melanoma cases in the district. In addition to filing legislation for \$150,000, I have also contacted Governor Cooper's office to seek support for the funding.



A Letter to Duke Energy to End Coal Power Plants in North Carolina by 2030



This week I joined many of my colleagues and signed a letter to the North Carolina Utilities Commission urging them to require Duke Energy to follow its **2020 Integrated Resource Plan** and **retire its coal-burning power plants by 2030 and replace them with clean energy**. The full letter can be read [here](#).

Duke Energy operates six coal plants across North Carolina that emit over 27 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution annually, making it the largest climate polluter in the state. Coal-burning plants in North Carolina also release dangerous levels of soot, sulfur

dioxide, nitrous oxides, and heavy metals, and they discharge wastewater laced with mercury and arsenic into rivers and lakes across the state.

Pollution from coal causes serious health effects and contributes to four of the five leading causes of death in North Carolina: cancer, stroke, heart disease, and upper respiratory disease. Black and low-income communities near coal plants have been hit hardest. North Carolina ranks fourth in the country in hospital admissions, heart attacks, and mortality from coal pollution.

Cities and counties across North Carolina—including Wake County, Buncombe County, Orange County, Durham, Raleigh, Carrboro, Chapel Hill, Asheville, Elon, and Charlotte—have clean energy goals that depend on retiring fossil generation and accelerating clean energy investments. **A coal-free North Carolina will save customers billions while providing cleaner air and water for everyone.**

Interview with Telemundo Charlotte



Last week I completed a remote interview with Belén Gómez-Jordana, a reporter with Telemundo Charlotte, about [SB180](#) to provide undocumented immigrants the opportunity to get restricted driver's licenses. It would improve everyone's safety & we hope for bipartisan support.

[Read the Full Bill Here](#)

Affordable Housing in Cornelius



Last Monday, I started the day attending the [Cornelius Coffee Chat](#), which included an update about COVID-19 from Gibbie Harris and a presentation about the **Town's plan to address its need for affordable housing**. I support the plan and am [seeking state funding](#) to help the Town develop the plan. Did you attend? What are your thoughts and input for the Cornelius affordable housing workgroup?

A New Urban Farm in Huntersville



Last week I joined community leaders from across Mecklenburg County to celebrate the **groundbreaking ceremony of Free Spirit Farm, one of North Carolina's largest urban farms**. This is an all-organic farm that protects water quality, emphasizes community

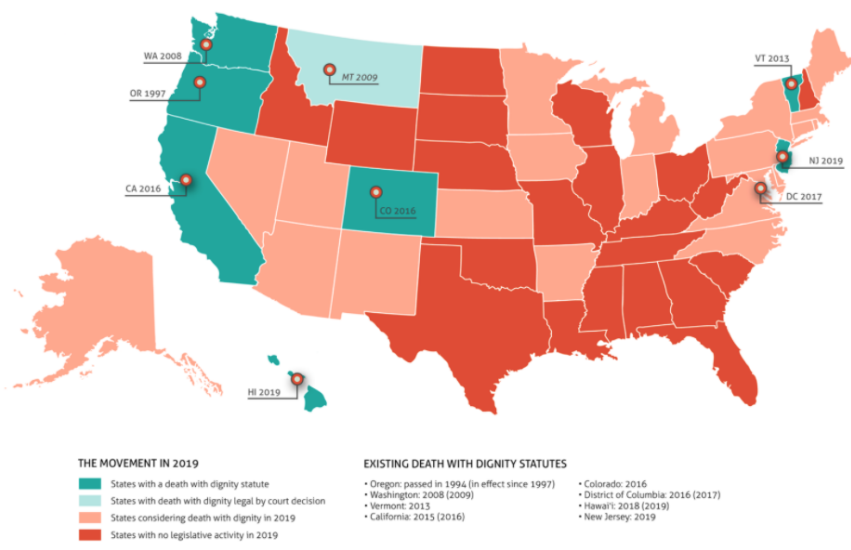
involvement, and provides fresh food to local residents. Neelu and Sri Burugapalli and her family (pictured on the right) generously donated the land where the urban farm will be built. They were raised in India, where their families farmed. Their daughter came up with the name, Free Spirit Farm. You can learn more about the Carolina Farm Trust and the Free Spirit Farm [here](#).

Wind Energy in North Carolina



Last week I met with leaders from the [Southeastern Wind Coalition](#), a non-profit that works to advance the wind industry across the Southeast. We discussed the development of **offshore wind energy on the North Carolina coast and the economic opportunities of the wind energy industry**. A [recent report](#) from the Department of Commerce shows that if North Carolina decides to compete in this industry, we could gain an estimated \$140 billion in investment. Virginia is already generating wind energy off of our coast! We are missing a fantastic opportunity and I will use my voice to encourage NC to get started with off-shore wind energy as quickly as possible.

Medical Aid in Dying



Earlier this week I met via Zoom with a registered nurse and the Executive Director of a group called Dying Right North Carolina to **discuss necessary changes to NC's laws about end of life**. I believe that when a patient is terminal, with less than six months to live, they should be permitted to legally request a prescription from a doctor to end their life when and where they choose. Other states allow this choice, which is a comfort to patients and their family members. More information about the Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) Act [here](#).

What is your experience with end of life options? What do you think about allowing self-administered medication to end one's life, knowing there will be protections in place against abuse and that a terminal diagnosis of less than six months is a prerequisite?

Free Legal Assistance for Small Businesses and Nonprofits

Impacted by COVID-19

NORTH CAROLINA
PRO BONO
RESOURCE CENTER

Are you a Small Business or Nonprofit that has a COVID-19 related legal question?

What is it:

This free remote clinic is designed to help small businesses and nonprofits navigate the legal issues they are experiencing due to COVID-19. Small businesses and nonprofits will get to meet with a lawyer for a free 45-minute legal consultation by phone or video conference (client preference). Clinic appointments are scheduled at a time that is convenient for the client and attorney. After you apply for services, we will match you with a lawyer, and the lawyer will call you to schedule your appointment. Interpretation is available in Spanish.

Who is eligible:

- North Carolina Small Businesses and Nonprofits
- Must have 25 or fewer employees
- Have been affected by COVID-19

What types of legal questions:

This clinic is to help small businesses and nonprofits with their legal needs that have arisen due to COVID-19. Areas of law include:

- Federal funding opportunities under the CARES ACT including Payroll Protection Program (PPP), State funding opportunities, Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) programs, and other funding opportunities.
- Commercial Lease issues (NC eviction moratoriums, lease amendments, landlord issues)
- Employment Law issues (Paid Family and Medical Leave, Unemployment, Furloughs, etc.)
- Insurance questions
- Bankruptcy & Dissolution
- Other COVID-19 related legal issues

How do I schedule an appointment with a lawyer?

Fill out our [Client Screening Form](#) online.

Questions:

Email help@ncprobono.org

ncprobono.org | PO Box 2448, Raleigh, NC 27602 | 919.890.1090 | @ncprobono

The North Carolina Pro Bono Resource Center is offering **free services to assist small businesses and nonprofits that have legal issues due to COVID-19**. Eligible organizations can meet with a lawyer for a free 45-minute legal consultation by phone or video conference. Key questions include: federal funding opportunities under the CARES Act, insurance questions, and commercial lease issues. You can schedule an appointment [here](#).

Thank You Cub Scouts Pack 167!

Thank you to the Cub Scouts of Pack 167 for inviting me back to speak during your virtual graduation ceremony. One of the joys of this job is the opportunity to meet the children and talk to them about the importance of honor, honesty, service, kindness and loyalty— all qualities of the Cub Scout law. **Congratulations to the Arrow of Light 5th graders on your accomplishments in scouting.**



Contact Our Office

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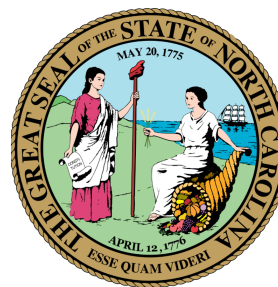
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How can we help you? Let us know and [reach out](#) to our office! We want to hear from you.

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