

**\*\*\*SPAM\*\*\* For Immediate Release**

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**From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate**  
Mecklenburg County

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Greetings:

*Last week began the grueling committee conversation regarding the state's budget. Putting together a balanced budget in the midst of a pandemic is a daunting task. We are working diligently to make sure the budget reflects the needs of North Carolinians.*

*Sincerely,*  
**Joyce Waddell**

## Labor Shortage

North Carolina business leaders say legislative action is needed to entice workers into rejoining the workforce as many businesses struggle to find workers going into the summer season. The hospitality and manufacturing sectors have had an especially hard time finding workers, according to the president of the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce. He said he gets calls every day from those sectors about the worker shortage, and cited a finding from North Carolina's Restaurant and Lodging Association that estimated restaurants are

down about 70,000 workers — or about 17% of the industry’s workforce — compared with before the pandemic.

He says the chamber has been pushing the Governor and lawmakers to stop sending out the extra \$300 a week in unemployment benefits from the federal government as one way to prod people back to work, though he’s not optimistic that will happen. “We’re disappointed that every indication is that the benefits will continue through September,” the Chamber President said, “so we’re looking now at what other opportunities are there to help folks get back to work quicker, help businesses recover faster.”

He says the chamber supports a GOP-backed bill that would provide \$1,500 signing bonuses to anyone on unemployment who gets a job within 30 days of the bill becoming law. The bonus would drop to \$800 if a person begins employment on or after 30 days but before 60 days. The measure would need approval from the federal government. The Chamber President says the chamber also supports the Governor’s recent executive order reinstating work search requirements for all North Carolinians on unemployment.

The chairman of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce, said businesses also needed to look at raising wages to a minimum of \$15 an hour — if not higher — to attract workers. “That was probably the right number years ago,” she said, “I’d love to see pay catch up to what it really costs to live in Charlotte.”

## **Pharmacy Benefit Managers**

Pharmacy benefit managers would need a license and face regulation from the N.C. Department of Insurance under a bill that passed the Senate on Tuesday. Senate Bill 257, titled the “Medication Cost Transparency Act,” would set up a regulatory framework for the entities that help determine prescription drug prices and insurance coverage for medications. A Senator from Lenoir County, said the rules are a “consensus” between the parties involved, and 40 other states are also considering similar regulations.

Among the regulations, according the bill summary: Pharmacy benefit managers “would be prohibited from preventing pharmacies from dispensing any drug, including specialty drugs, and from retaliating against pharmacies.” Managers also couldn’t retroactively deny coverage for drugs. “This is an industry that’s very difficult to understand,” the Senator said. The goal of the bill is to make the prices

of medication more transparent to patients, so that the role of pharmacy benefit managers as a middleman between drug manufacturers and insurers doesn't result in surprises to patients. The bill also includes some protections for "340B" entities such as community health centers, which typically get lower prices on medications to serve low-income patients. The bill now goes to the House.

## Landowner Protections

North Carolina landowners are one step closer to joining residents of five other Southeastern states that have enacted legal protections for owners of family property passed down for generations. Known as heirs' land, jointly owned property inherited from a family member who died without a will is more prominent in this part of the country and throughout the South, experts say, where there are more Black farmers.

Without a clear title for their property, lower-income, disadvantaged or minority families who are more likely to own land passed down to them in this way remain vulnerable to wealthy speculators seeking to divide family members and make a profit by forcing a sale of the land at what is often far less than market value. While other states said to have high concentrations of heirs' land and a steep decline in Black land ownership have passed legislation in recent years protecting owners of the land, North Carolina remains a holdout. This year, legislation headed up by two Republicans in the conservative-majority state legislature seeks to remedy that. House Bill 367 passed the state House in May.

Though North Carolina has one of the largest populations of Black farmers and an estimated \$1.86 billion of heirs' land, the proposal has faced more opposition among lawmakers here than it has in other states that recently passed the legislation. That may be partly because those who would benefit the most from this legislation lack the same political and economic power that many other bills that successfully pass North Carolina's legislature have behind them. "They just don't have the juice to move a bill through the legislature," said the drafter of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act that 18 states have adopted. "It's sad, but it's a fact of life."

The proposed legislation would benefit rural and urban landowners of all races and socioeconomic statuses across the state, advocates say. But some lawmakers have argued that the additional protections

proposed would create more work for court clerks, who would be tasked with determining whether property being sold or split is heirs' land and finding an appraiser and real-estate broker if the land will be sold. Those clerks are the force behind the opposition. It remains to be seen if the proposal will face opposition in the Senate, whose members are sponsoring an identical bill. Asked if he expected the legislation to pass, Senate majority whip and sponsor of the bill, Sen. Tom McInnis, R-Richmond, said, "I don't see why it wouldn't."

*I am approaching the Summer months optimistically cautious. I have noticed more and more people are feeling comfortable about not wearing their mask. I understand the mask frustration, but I want to caution you to approach this time of year carefully. If you will be in the midst of a crowd, be thoughtful and continue to wash your hands.*

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