

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

From Sen. Joyce Waddell <joyce.waddell@ncleg.net>
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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 was a busy legislative week. We are racing to the budget finish line. When session ends, we will take a brief break and get back to the business of redistricting. During the break, I will be working in the district. My Raleigh office will remain open, so please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Joyce Waddell

Highlighted Bills of the week

HB 398 - Pistol Purchase Permit Repeal

HB 398 repeals the requirement to obtain a pistol purchase permit from the sheriff prior to the purchase or transfer of a pistol. The

current law requires an individual to obtain a purchase permit from the sheriff of the county in which the individual resides prior to purchase or receipt of a pistol, unless the individual has a concealed carry permit. Failure to obtain the permit or have a concealed carry permit prior to purchase or receipt of a pistol is a Class 2 misdemeanor. Prior to issuance of the purchase permit, the sheriff must (i) conduct a criminal background investigation through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) and a criminal history check through the Administrative Office of the Court, (ii) determine the applicant's good moral character, and (iii) determine that the possession of the weapon is for only certain identified purposes. Federal law requires federal firearms licensees (FFL) to conduct a criminal background check through the NCIS before selling or delivering handguns to an individual unless a valid State permit is presented to the FFL. The bill passed both houses and will be heading to the Governor's office.

SB 35 - Max 4-Yr Age Diff to Marry Under 18 Yrs

Senate Bill 35 would amend the lawful age of marriage to 16 years of age or older and would provide a maximum four-year age difference for a 16- or 17- year-old to marry. Current law allows persons over 14 but under 16 to marry under certain conditions. The bill passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor.

Budget Timeline

Budget negotiations between the House and Senate are beginning this week, but there are no plans for the Governor to have a seat at the table immediately. The Senate leader outlined the process on Tuesday, and he said budget writers from the two chambers want to reach a tentative compromise first. Then they want the governor to weigh in before the legislature takes a final vote on the spending plan.

“This is a little different from the way we’ve done it in the past,” when lawmakers tried to negotiate a deal with the Governor after he vetoed the budget, the senate leader said. “Hopefully we can give him an idea of what we are going to agree to and let him voice his thoughts on those things, and see if there’s some accommodation that can be made

to address the concerns.” He said he is hopeful that the two chambers can resolve most of their differences by the end of the month. If an agreement can be reached with the Governor in the following weeks, the goal is to have final floor votes on the budget around Sept. 9.

The Senate leader says one of the key points of contention involves how certain budget items should be funded. He pointed out that the House budget opted to use the State Capital and Infrastructure Fund, or SCIF, to pay for programs that the Senate budget funded from other sources.

The budget timeline will dictate when this year’s long session will finally wrap up. They remain hopeful that if a compromise budget can be enacted by mid-September, lawmakers would likely adjourn while redistricting committees conduct public hearings on proposed congressional and legislative maps. Then the full chamber could vote on maps in October. If the budget process drags on longer, there might not be a break before the redistricting session.

Prison COVID

Though COVID-19 is surging across North Carolina, case counts are still low among those incarcerated in the state’s prisons. Just 21 of the system’s nearly 29,000 inmates have an active case of COVID-19 as of Monday, according to data from the Department of Public Safety. The chief medical officer for the prison system, attributes the low numbers in part to the same mitigation measures that have been in place throughout much of the pandemic, like mandatory masking. But he also says vaccination has made a big difference.

“We are about 63% of our offenders are vaccinated, we really estimate that there’s probably another 18% of those unvaccinated offenders who have had COVID and have some level of immunity,” said the Chief Medical Officer. “So that really effectively, you know, puts the overall immunity for the offender population close to 80%.” He also said they are deploying more resources to prisons in areas with high levels of COVID-19 transmission. “Quite frankly, we do see historically that when the county cases, you know, rise, we have seen subsequently the cases rise in the prisons that are in those counties,” he stated.

In a NC county, where cases are rising sharply, the chief medical

officer says they've increased testing at two area prisons and are running clinics to try to increase vaccination rates among inmates and staff. Rates among staff are still on the low side – the Chief Medical Officer says about 50% have not gotten their shots. A new executive order does require prison employees to show proof of vaccination by September 1 or submit to weekly testing. Unvaccinated staff members are currently tested biweekly.

Unfortunately, our COVID numbers are increasing. I have expressed many times my strong urge for us to create an environment of safety for ourselves and our neighbors. Please mask up, wash your hands often, and create a habit of social distancing.

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