

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:

The General Assembly did not meet last week. I have been attending meetings in the district. We are awaiting the courts' decision regarding redistricting.

Please contact my office if you have any questions or concerns regarding District 40.

Joyce Waddell

Workforce Development

The State Superintendent is calling on North Carolina's public schools to change how they prepare students for life after high school to help the business community get the workers they need. At a webinar Wednesday hosted by the N.C. Chamber, the superintendent repeatedly pointed to how fewer students are going to college at the same time that businesses are saying they're not getting workers with the right experience or credentials. She said the answer is for a

sharper focus on workforce development in schools.

It is a fact that fewer students are going to college, and fewer students are going to community college, and we need to ensure that our public K-12 education system is an engine of economic mobility for all students.

Many students are not being encouraged to find a path that suits their needs and interests. Instead, schools have treated career planning as being something for students who don't intend to go to college. We should not be telling certain students that they can not go to college, we also should not require or tell all students that the only way for them to be economically mobile or be successful is through a four-year college degree, because that is just not how our workforce is functioning right now.

The superintendent lauded efforts such as The ROC, a program in Charlotte that trains high school students for careers in construction trades. She said schools need to introduce students to different career paths that are available and get them to talk about other things than just being a doctor, lawyer or nurse.

The vast majority of jobs will require some kind of post-secondary education and credential of value. While that can include a four-year college degree, it can also include things such as a truck driver credential or a welding credential. Later this year, the superintendent said the state's new Portrait of a Graduate project will present information on the skills that students need for success after high school.

I have always believed that education is the key to a good future. I support our school systems and their leadership, and believe they are also open to preparing our communities to finding careers.

Robocalls Lawsuit

North Carolina is seeking hundreds of billions of dollars in a lawsuit the Attorney General filed Tuesday against a company accused of helping scammers place some of the robocalls that inundate people's phones.

Texas-based telecommunications business Articul8 helped facilitate scam calls across the country, the lawsuit says. That includes tens of millions of calls to North Carolinians, even though the company either knew or should have known that it was helping criminals try to

defraud people, the lawsuit says.

Rather than targeting individual scammers, many of whom are overseas, the state is instead going after the company that has been routing their calls and making a good profit doing so, the Attorney General said in an interview Tuesday. “All of these robocalls that inundate our phones can only happen if there are telephone companies willing to turn a blind eye,” he said.

Fentanyl Proliferation

A rising number of people in North Carolina have landed in hospital emergency departments due to drug overdoses involving fentanyl. Fentanyl and its synthetic opioid cousins are much stronger than other common opioids, such as heroin, morphine or prescription painkillers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fentanyl is at least 100 times more powerful than an equivalent amount of morphine.

Despite its intense potency, in recent years, fentanyl has been added to almost every kind of illegal drug. Though the epidemic has long been viewed as a “white problem” because white people made up the majority of opioid-related overdose deaths over the last two decades, that is no longer the case. As fentanyl spreads, people who use other drugs, including stimulants such as cocaine and methamphetamine, have been pulled into the opioid epidemic. “While overdose death rates have increased in every major demographic group in recent years, no group has seen a bigger increase than Black men,” reads a new report from the Pew Research Center. People using drugs do not always know if or how much fentanyl could be in the substance they are using, making the street drug supply deadlier than before. Fentanyl test strips, which detect the added substance, are available through some county health departments and harm reduction agencies.

The CDC has also noted an increase in fentanyl being pressed into counterfeit pills and sold on the streets masquerading as oxycodone, alprazolam and other prescription drugs. These deadly counterfeits are expanding into new markets, the agency said. Locally, the state’s emergency department monitoring system shows an increasing number of overdose visits involving fentanyl during the pandemic. In general, there was a 25 percent increase in all drug overdose emergency department visits from 2019 to 2020. Provisional data coming in from 2021 suggests that last year’s overdose ER visits will

surpass 2020. These numbers are only one indicator of the problem. Some people do not receive help in time to make it to the hospital. In November, the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reported 3,595 suspected drug overdose deaths for 2021 to date, surpassing the year's total for 2020 of 3,132.

Because the illegal drug market is teeming with fentanyl, CDC experts recommend that state and local public health agencies adapt overdose prevention, harm reduction and response efforts quickly to address the high potency of fentanyl and the various ways it is used, whether by injection, mixed with a stimulant or ingested as a counterfeit pill.

We must equip law-enforcement with the necessary tools to get this illicit drug out of our communities. It is also important to our state that we put the necessary medical assistance in place to protect our communities.

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