

**\*\*\*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:**

*The General Assembly met this week to confirm a commission nominee for the North Carolina Utilities Commission HJR 975, SJR 748 Adjourning the Senate until May, and vote on SB 173 Free the Smiles Act.*

*Joyce Waddell*

**Urban Counties**

Wake County and Mecklenburg County will each have 13 House seats when the 2023 legislative session convenes. How many of those are held by Republicans could determine whether or not the GOP has a super majority in the 120-member House. Currently, two Republicans represent those counties in the chamber.

The new House districts, which were approved 115-5 by the chamber but still must be approved by the courts, show the magnitude

of the challenge in Wake and Mecklenburg. The past President carried just one of the 26 districts, the 37th in southeastern Wake County, in his 2020 re-election bid.

## **Confirmation Hearing**

The Senate voted to confirm Karen Kemerait to the North Carolina Utilities Commission at noon on Wednesday. She was nominated by the Governor as an at-large member to the commission 10 months ago — on May 5, 2021. Kemerait is a partner at Fox Rothschild and previously served as the chair of the Board of Adjustments for Raleigh, the vice chair of WakeUP Wake County and a law clerk at the North Carolina Court of Appeals. Kemerait has appeared before the commission on behalf of water and wastewater companies, natural gas companies and telecommunications companies, according to her Fox Rothschild biography.

## **Instructional Time**

The State Board of Education heard Wednesday about a new study assessing what the state's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is calling the impact of lost instructional time on North Carolina students due to COVID-19. The study found an impact in almost every subject. The executive director of the Office of Learning Recovery & Acceleration at DPI, stressed that COVID-19 alone was responsible for the results.

In contrast to many studies that compare pre-pandemic students' performance with current students' performance, this study projected how students would have performed had COVID-19 never happened. A team then compared that with how those same students actually performed. According to the report, the only subject where the impact of COVID-19 was not felt was English II. And students' results were especially impacted in math. The report states that, during the pandemic, students of all races and ethnicities did less well than expected, and existing disparities were exacerbated. Similarly, the gap between students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and other students widened. The report states that this was especially true in fourth, sixth, and eighth grade reading, and fifth grade math.

The report will come to the General Assembly. The Office of Learning and Recovery intends this to be the first of many levels of data analysis

related to the pandemic. It was stated during last week's webinar that the next phase will be to work with districts on their data so that they can focus recovery work on students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.



### ***Senator Waddell Recognizes Women's History Month***

*Senator Waddell used a moment of personal privilege to enlighten the Senate chamber that March is the month to celebrate Women's History Month. In addition to Women's History Month, she also recognized The Madie Maddox Women's Health Equity Institute of Charlotte.*

### ***Senator Waddell in the Community***

*Senator Waddell attends a community event featuring 100 food companies and products made exclusively in North Carolina. As a representative of the North Carolina Senate, learning the services and products created in the state is an important part of where to invest dollars as the biennium budget is being developed.*



## **Crisis Hotline**

In July, there will be a new universal phone number — 9-8-8 — for

people across the United States to call when they or someone around them experiences a mental health crisis. The idea is that it is short, easy to remember and the same everywhere. Right now, most everyone knows to call 9-1-1 in an emergency. Law enforcement and emergency responders are not always equipped to help someone who is in mental health distress or having a psychotic episode or thinking about suicide.

People with mental health issues are 16 times more likely to be killed by police, according to a 2015 report from the Treatment Advocacy Center. On top of that, people of color are killed by law enforcement at much higher rates than white people, according to a Washington Post database of all fatal police shootings. The 9-8-8 mental health crisis number is designed to give people a different option that isn't routed through law enforcement.

The state is working to hire more people to answer the phone. The call center is contracted out to a group called Real Crisis Intervention headquartered in the eastern part of the state. 9-8-8 callers will immediately be put in touch with a trained crisis counselor. Many times, the counselor can help de-escalate the situation over the phone.

If the caller is still in need of help, a mobile crisis team of mental health professionals will respond. The hope is that when people dial 9-8-8 during a mental health crisis instead of 9-1-1, mental health crisis teams will be dispatched to respond to these situations, not law enforcement.

Senator Waddell is working tirelessly for Senate District 40, but she cannot do this alone. Can she count on your help to continue working for the district?

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