

Latest Updates from the NCGA



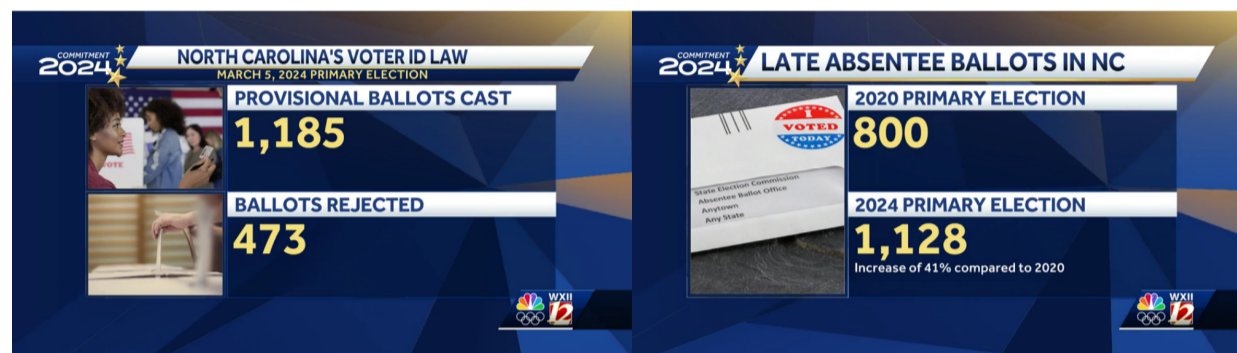
From Sen. Natasha Marcus <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
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Date 2024-03-22 17:03



NC Senate District 41 Newsletter

March 22, 2024

Over 1,600 Ballots Not Counted in North Carolina's Primary Election



According to data released by the North Carolina State Board of Elections, **more than 1,600 ballots went uncounted in the primary election earlier this month.** These ballots were thrown out per the new laws passed during the last session. **SB747 changed the long-standing rule that allowed mail-in ballots to be counted as long as they were postmarked by Election Day and received within three days of the Election (the three-day grace period).** Under SB747, ballots must arrive by 7:30 PM on Election Day in order to be counted; if they come in the next day they are not counted, even if postmarked on or before Election Day. **SB749** requires that voters show an approved form of identification in order to cast a vote.

Data shows that approximately one out of every 1,520 votes cast were forced to be cast as "provisional" due to the new voter ID requirement. While a majority of the 1,185 provisional votes were counted after the voter took additional steps to either complete an ID Exception Form or visit their local board of elections to present an ID after their vote, **473 provisional ballots were not counted.** Nearly all of these were thrown out because the voter did not take one of the two additional steps required by the new state law, but a few dozen votes went uncounted because the voter's form was not accepted.

The number of late absentee ballots compared to previous elections is staggering. In the 2020 primary, 800 mail-in ballots were marked "returned after deadline." This year, 1,128 ballots were returned after the new, earlier deadline. **Eliminating the three-day grace period for these ballots to arrive by mail resulted in a 41% increase in late absentee votes.**

When the majority passed SB747, over the Governor's veto and my "no" vote, we warned them that valid ballots would be thrown in the trash. Now we know our concerns were valid. **It is the opposite of election integrity to not count a person's vote because the mail was slow.** Learn more [here](#).

The Future of North Carolina's Wetlands



A lawsuit in North Carolina may test how federal courts interpret the ruling the Supreme Court made last year in *Sackett v. EPA*, which reduced the number of wetlands that qualify as waters of the United States. The "waters of the United States" refers to bodies of water defined in the U.S. Clean Water Act whose degradation could impact interstate or foreign commerce. **By changing the definition of wetlands, approximately 1 million acres of wetlands in North Carolina have lost federal oversight.** That land is now vulnerable to legislation like [SB582](#), the North Carolina Farm Act of 2023, which passed last year despite my vote against it. SB582 changed North Carolina's definition of the term "wetland" to match the definition created by *Sackett v. EPA*, and removed protections that would require a permit for "impacts to any isolated or other federal non-jurisdictional wetland." North Carolina's wetlands are vital, not only as the first line of defense against flooding, but as natural water filtration systems for our rivers and lakes and as essential ecosystems to many native species. **Degradation of North Carolina's wetlands will impact flood management and access to clean drinking water for countless North Carolinians.** Learn more [here](#).

Sinking Land, Rising Sea Levels, and Coastal Flooding



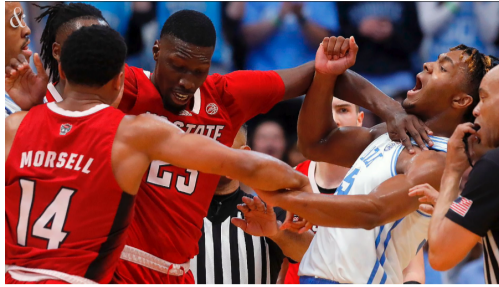
In a study published earlier this month, a team of scientists combined and compared data on the rising sea levels and lowering of coastal land to point out areas that will be intensely impacted by both factors. **The research shows that 32 U.S. cities will be more susceptible to destructive flooding and inundation. Wilmington is among those cities.** Coastal subsidence, or sinking land in coastal areas, is often unconsidered or underrepresented in the policies and urban planning that is used to manage coastal cities. A combination of these factors will result in more shoreline erosion than previously estimated. 2023's hurricane season made history with the number of named storms seen, and the size, number, and impact of hurricanes will continue to grow. **Current state law forbids considering the rise of sea level when setting coastal policy. This needs to change if we intend to maintain and protect coastal properties and communities.** Learn more [here](#).

North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles Launches New Grocery Store Kiosk Program in Senate District 41



A new pilot program aimed at reducing DMV wait times has launched and it's in Senate District 41. Self-service kiosks that allow customers to renew driver's licenses, order duplicates, change addresses, print temporary identification, and register to vote will be placed at a number of Harris Teeter locations across the state, and the first one is already operational at the Harris Teeter off Smith Farm Road (4701 Smith Farm Rd, Charlotte, NC 28216). Intellectual Technology Incorporated, the company contracted to provide the kiosks, will collect a \$4.95 fee per transaction, plus a 2.35 percent credit/debit card fee. The State of North Carolina does not collect or benefit from the transaction fee. Learn more [here](#).

NC Public Universities and Sports Betting Revenue



As I'm sure the constant advertisements have made clear, North Carolinians ages 21 and older can now wager on professional and college sports. What you may not know is that eight betting firms have been licensed in North Carolina and their revenue will be taxed at 18%. The state estimates that this will yield approximately \$65 million in revenue next fiscal year and over \$100 million over the next four years.

13 of North Carolina's 16 public universities will receive annual funding from the revenue from sports betting. **On top of an annual \$300,000 endowment, 20% of the revenue earned will be used to support these universities' athletic departments and programs.** The UNC System Schools that will benefit are listed below:

- Appalachian State University
- East Carolina University
- Elizabeth City State University
- Fayetteville State University
- NC A&T State University
- NC Central University
- UNC Asheville
- UNC Charlotte
- UNC Greensboro
- UNC Pembroke
- UNC Wilmington
- Western Carolina University
- Winston-Salem State University

Learn more [here](#).

Department of Public Safety Reports



As a member of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, I received several legislative reports from North Carolina's Department of Public Safety over the course of the last few weeks. Some of the most salient details from each report are below:

Assaults on Staff in State Juvenile Detention Centers

- Youth Development Centers offer long-term, residential commitment services, while juvenile detention centers primarily house youth prior to their trial.
- In 2023, 16 assaults were committed against staff employed at either a Youth Development Center or a juvenile detention center.
- Eight delinquent petitions or criminal charges were filed for individual juveniles, and the remaining potential violations were resolved according to internal policy.

Victims Compensation Administrative Report

- This report included data for the Victims Compensation Program for State Fiscal Years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, ending January 31, 2024.
- In Fiscal Year 2022-2023:
 - 1,211 claims were pending and the beginning date
 - 3,174 claims were filed
 - 2,656 awards were made
 - \$3,761,085 was carried over from the prior fiscal year
- In Fiscal Year 2023-2024:
 - 1,906 claims were filed
 - 1,260 awards were made
 - \$4,941,497 was carried over from the prior fiscal year
- As of the report, the North Carolina Crime Victims Fund Unencumbered Balance was \$9,820,868
- Outreach Efforts
 - In Fiscal Year 2022-2023, the Department of Public Safety provided webinars in English and Spanish to educate the public about the application process for Crime Victim Compensation. 76.5 million Victim Compensation Services messages were delivered across various platforms and were viewed by an audience of 9,126,181.

Changes in North Carolina Tax Law: Unauthorized Substances Tax



The Unauthorized Substances Tax, or the NC Drug Tax, is a remnant of the War on Drugs passed by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1989. This bill created an excise tax on controlled substances, such as marijuana, and must be paid by anyone in possession of such a substance. Though tax stamps may be purchased anonymously, the NC Department of Revenue (DOR) often levies the tax following an individual's time served on a related charge. If a person does not purchase a tax stamp and is found in possession of one of the specified substances, the law enforcement agency reports the failure to pay the tax to the DOR. The DOR then assesses any back taxes, interest, or penalties the individual owes on the substance. This debt dramatically increases the difficulty of rebuilding an individual's life after incarceration. Individuals may shoulder tens of thousands of dollars in debt, and the DOR can garnish wages, seize property, and withdraw money from an individual's bank account to ensure that the debt is paid. Even when an investigation does not result in a criminal conviction, 75% of the revenue earned is returned to the law enforcement agency that opened the investigation.

While North Carolina will continue to impose the tax, a change has been made to the collection window that will provide relief to some encumbered by the law. **I voted in favor of the bill that created a statute of limitations on the drug tax, SB174,** last year. The bill was signed by the Governor in April of 2023. As a result, there is a 10-year statute of limitations for enforcing tax debts that begins once the tax becomes collectible. After the window on collection closes, any debt remaining will be eliminated. Wages can no longer be garnished, property may not be seized, and money may not be withdrawn to enforce the old debt.

If you or someone you know owes a drug tax debt that is more than 10 years old, you can confirm with the NC Department of Revenue that your debt has been forgiven by calling **(919) 707-7596**. Learn more [here](#).

Senator Marcus in the Community



Last week, I toured Charlotte's newest sliding scale healthcare provider - the Sugar Creek Health Center. Located at 721 W. Sugar Creek Road, it is the first [Cabarrus Rowan Community Health Center](#) (CRCHC) located in Mecklenburg County. CRCHC is a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides healthcare to all members of a community, including those who may not be able to afford it through traditional sources. While Sugar Creek Health Center is CRCHC's first location in Mecklenburg County, they have been providing services to Mecklenburg County residents at their Cabarrus and Rowan County locations and with their mobile units for years. They offer a wide range of services at their various clinic locations, including but not limited to medical, dental, behavioral health, mammography, substance abuse, HIV, urgent care, and prescriptions. Mecklenburg County residents can receive care at any of their locations. To find out more and book an appointment, visit their website (link above) and click [Sugar Creek Clinic](#) for the Mecklenburg location. Staff is bilingual, and they treat patients regardless of immigration status and ability to pay.



This week, I joined the [Charlotte Regional Business Alliance](#) for a conversation with Senate Democratic Leader Dan Blue and House Democratic Leader Robert Reives regarding the organization's legislative agenda and policy goals for the upcoming session. Some of the most important topics of discussion event included:

- Navigating culture wars. Conservative legislation such as 2016's [HB2](#), or the "Bathroom Bill," severely impacted Charlotte's and the state's business and hiring. Legislators and the business community should work together to avoid similar bills that perpetuate culture wars.
- Medicaid expansion. The expansion of Medicaid provides insurance for working people, which in turn helps both workers and businesses.
- The importance of education. Community colleges meet the needs of businesses and need to be nimble in adjusting to the shifting needs in various industries. Additional investments are needed, including for the expansion of UNC Charlotte's Data Analytics Program. Their [Data Analytics Boot Camp](#) is the leading program in its region.
- The importance of a public safety network. A public safety network is key to protecting businesses and tourism, and preventative measures such as firearm safety reform and support for law enforcement are vital components of this network.
- The renewal of tax credits for childcare facilities. These tax breaks are expiring and are crucial for the workforce, and the [funding cliff facing the childcare system could have dire consequences if not addressed](#).
- Robust public transportation. Mobility funding should be a priority of the NCGA, as mass transit helps to reduce congestion, pollution and vehicle accidents.
- Affordable Housing. The NCGA cut funding of the Housing Finance Agency, which was a mistake when this issue remains a real problem, especially in our urban centers, where the majority of our state's economic activity is generated.

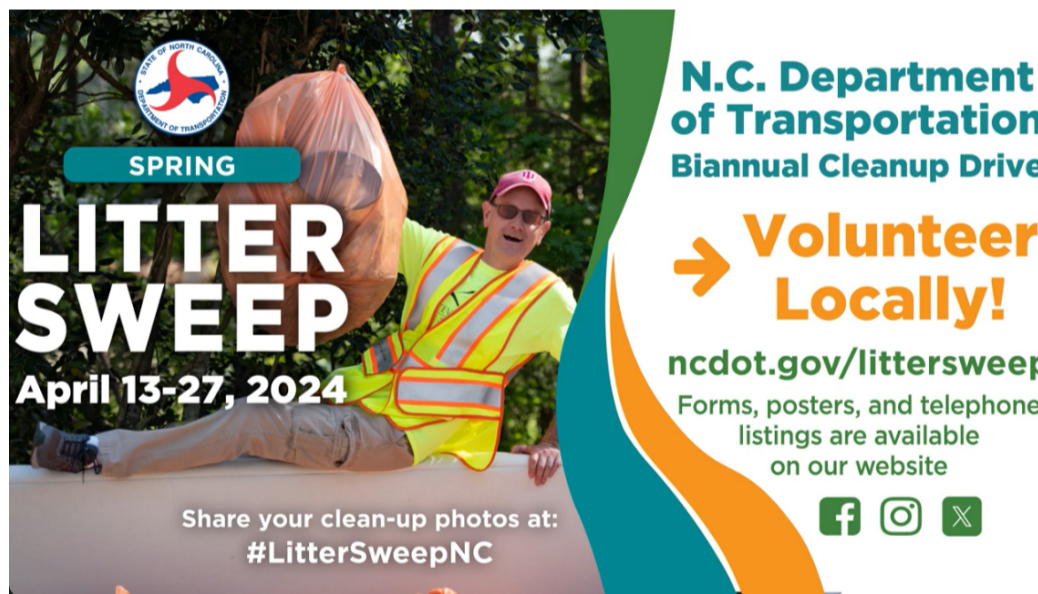


I toured [ECPI University's](#) Charlotte campus. ECPI is an accredited private university that focuses on interactive learning through industry-related experience. ECPI graduates the highest number of African American nurses in the nation and is filling the need for nurses, computer engineers, and automation engineers. The university allows students to earn their degree in about half the time due to an intense class schedule that meets between five and seven days a week.

While touring the Charlotte campus, I met a student named Danny, a 30-year-old restaurant manager who wanted to build a more lucrative and rewarding career. Danny is now the first person in his family to attend college and plans to finish his degree in accounting. I also met three young men who had served in various branches of the military and were getting their degrees in Computer Science, who already had job opportunities lined up. The nursing students have access to state of the art automated and lifelike mannequin "patients," which allow them to practice before they do their hospital rotations. I met several teachers who were passionate about working with students, many of whom were starting second careers and/or starting college later than the typical student.

I will be the keynote speaker at this summer's graduation ceremony.

North Carolina Litter Sweep: April 13 - 27



Tired of trash along the highways? Here is your invitation to help. The 2024 Spring Litter Sweep will take place from April 13 through April 27. Litter Sweep is the N.C. Department of Transportation's statewide litter removal initiative. Residents participate in local efforts by gathering litter along roadsides into orange bags, which are later collected by NCDOT maintenance crews. Learn more [here](#). Find your local coordinator [here](#).

NC Year of the Trail Celebration



Earlier this month, [Piedmont Land Conservancy](#) hosted an event at Dorothea Dix Park in Raleigh celebrating the end of the NC Year of the Trail campaign. At the event, the organization introduced its new branding for North Carolina: [The Great Trails State](#). The Great Trails State Coalition is comprised of nonprofits, local governments, and members of the industry, all dedicated to increasing state investment in North Carolina trails. Their website provides a tool to help [locate a trail in your area](#), as well as a link to the [NC Division of Parks and Recreation's Great Trails State Program](#), a grant program that provides funding for new trail development and extension of existing trails in North Carolina.

New Business Announcement: Tea Lounge Open in SD41



Third places, or locations where members of a community may congregate outside of the workplace and the home, are an essential component to any neighborhood. Sherry Waters' new [Pauline Tea-Bar Apothecary](#) location in SD41, on the corner of Beatties Ford Road and Oaklawn Avenue, is one such place. The tea lounge offers tea, pastries, and a place for residents of the neighboring communities to connect with one another. Both the new location and the original location in the Camp Greene neighborhood regularly host yoga sessions, DIY workshops, and other events. Learn more [here](#).

Foster Kittens This Spring



Spring is kitten season, and local animal shelters are often overburdened with newborn strays. **Thousands of kittens are born locally during kitten season.** While [Cornelius Animal Shelter](#), [Cats of Davidson](#), [Piedmont Animal Rescue](#), and [Angels to the Animals](#) all do their part to address the surge of new life, funding, space, and time are limited. **Volunteers are a necessary part of the solution.** Rescue organizations can only take in so many litters; fostering is a great way to reduce the burden on shelters. If you don't have the space to foster, consider donating time or money to a local shelter or sharing available cats and kittens in local rescues with your community. **I have personally volunteered with several local rescue organizations and have found it to be time well spent.** Learn more [here](#).

The Ada Jenkins Center Offers Help With Your Taxes



The [Ada Jenkins Center](#)'s VITA Program is currently assisting households with incomes of \$66,000 or less with Free Tax Preparation Services every Saturday and Thursday from now until April 15th. There is limited availability for same-day or walk-in appointments at locations in Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville. **Appointments are required.** The schedule for the tax season is listed below:

Saturdays from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

- Ada Jenkins Center (212 Gamble Street, Davidson, NC 28036)
 - [Appointment Link](#)
- Charlotte Mecklenburg North County Regional Library (16500 Holly Crest Lane, Huntersville, NC 28078)
 - [Appointment Link](#)

Thursdays from 5:00 - 7:00 PM

- First Baptist Church of Cornelius (21017 Catawba Avenue, Cornelius, NC 28031)
 - [Appointment Link](#)

If you have questions, email the [VITA Program](#) or call/text **(704) 765-6195**. Read more [here](#).

Need in the North Guided Van Tours



The Ada Jenkins Center is now conducting guided van tours through underprivileged neighborhoods and communities in Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville. **More than 5%, or 1 in 20, members of the neighborhoods surrounding Lake Norman live below the Federal Poverty Level.** These tours are designed to enlighten participants through a focus on the history of and obstacles encountered by each community. Each tour runs from 10:00AM to 2:00PM, starting and ending at the Ada Jenkins Center (**212 Gamble Street, Davidson**). Leaders from Pottstown, Smithville, Huntington Green, and Davidson West will guide each tour. Register for a tour [here](#). For any questions, contact [Diane Means](#). Learn more [here](#).

2024 North Carolina Awards Nominations Open Until April 1



Nominations are being accepted for the 2024 North Carolina Award, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the state, now through April 1. The 2024 North Carolina Award recipients will be honored at an event later this year. Past award recipients have included distinguished artists, poets, writers, performers, journalists, scientists, and public servants.

Administered by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, the award recognizes “notable accomplishments by North Carolina citizens” in the fields of literature, science, fine arts and public service.

Award nominations may be submitted by anyone. The [nomination form](#) is available online. To receive forms by mail or e-mail, contact [Jennifer Fontes](#) or call **(919) 814-6756**. After reviewing the initial nominations, the North Carolina Awards Committee will request additional information from nominators as needed. The committee will make its final selections this summer. Learn more [here](#).

North Carolina Zoo Ranks Third Best Zoo in the Nation



The North Carolina Zoo in Asheboro ranked third for Best Zoo 2024 by USA Today. A panel of experts nominated zoos across the United States based on their levels of animal care and enrichment and their ability to facilitate meaningful interactions between animals and visitors. Readers then voted to determine the winners. In particular, the North Carolina Zoo's featured habitats that may have contributed to its high ranking include the enormous prairie habitat used to house bison and elk and the Watani Grasslands Habitat that showcases the biodiversity of sub-Saharan Africa. Learn more [here](#). View the full list [here](#).

Financial Update on the State's General Fund

Beginning Cash, Friday, March 08	12,158,940,011.17
Add Receipts:	
Tax and Non-Tax Receipts	699,199,922.90
Coronavirus Relief Receipts	0.00
Other Receipts	486,105,297.85
Less Disbursements:	
Payroll	186,303,006.74
State Aid	248,795,031.62
Medicaid/Other Provider Payments	230,346,356.48
Tax Refunds/Distributions	559,190,045.30
Debt Service	0.00
Coronavirus Relief Transfers Out	0.00
General Operating	573,154,362.93
Ending Cash, Friday, March 15	11,546,456,428.85
Less Reserved Cash:	
Due to Local Governments – Sales and Use Tax Payable	442,037,729.11
Other Reserves	25,560,854.34
American Recovery Plan Act Reserve	10,397,748.28
Carry Forward Reserve	250,122,435.20
Clean Water Drinking Water Reserve	1,000,000,000.00
Coronavirus Capital Projects Reserve	0.00
Coronavirus Relief Reserve	0.00
Earthquake Disaster Recovery Reserve	0.00
Economic Development Project Reserve	248,550,000.00
Federal Infrastructure Match Reserve	121,758,723.00
Housing Reserve	0.00
Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Reserve	57,319,898.56
Information Technology Reserve	108,961,174.00
Local Fiscal Recovery Reserve-ARPA	0.00
Local Govt Coronavirus Relief Reserve	0.00
Local Project Reserve	0.00
Medicaid Contingency Reserve	326,512,736.00
Medicaid Transformation Reserve	60,642,170.00
NC GREAT Reserve	0.00
NC Innovation Reserve	0.00
Opioid Abatement Reserve	12,910,341.72
Public School Contingency Reserve	0.00
Public School Need Based Capital Reserve	0.00
Reg Economic Dev Reserve	4,650,000.00
Repairs and Renovations Reserve	0.00
Retiree Supplement Reserve	5,227,675.00
SCIF General Fund Reserve	0.00
Savings Reserve	4,750,001,113.98
Stabilization and Inflation Reserve	1,000,000,000.00
State Emergency Response/Disaster Reserve	670,684,393.53
Transportation Reserve	0.00
Unfunded Liability Solvency Reserve	0.00
Wilmington Harbor Enhancements Reserve	283,800,000.00
World University Games Reserve	0.00
Unreserved Cash Balance, Friday, March 15	2,167,319,436.13

The Office of the State Controller (OSC) released the General Fund Cash Watch numbers for the week ending Friday, March 15. OSC provides a weekly update on the State’s General Fund cash position which can be found at osc.nc.gov. **The current unreserved cash balance in state coffers is \$2.167 billion.**

The State Controller is North Carolina’s chief fiscal officer and serves as an independent resource to ensure the financial integrity of the State.

Links to Helpful Information

Domestic Violence Hotline: If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence or partner abuse, please call [Safe Alliance](#) at **704-332-2513** and they can help you.

Mecklenburg's County Bar [website](#) provides a list of pro bono resources for those unable to afford legal counsel.

Mecklenburg's Department of Community Resources provides individuals and families with [immediate access](#) to a diverse range of Mecklenburg County Health and Human Services programs and community partner services in Community Resources Centers throughout the County.

Mecklenburg's Energy Assistance Programs: Do you need help paying your heating or cooling bills? Mecklenburg offers [two different programs](#) to help eligible low-income households with their energy needs.

Property Tax values and histories in Mecklenburg County can be searched on [this site](#) that includes links to Polaris and information about past assessments. You can find more detailed information on real estate values on the [Mecklenburg](#) site.

Suicide Prevention: If you have thoughts of harming yourself, **please call or text 988**, the Suicide Prevention Hotline for help.

Unclaimed Cash! Visit [NCCash.com](#) today to see if you have unclaimed property under the supervision of the NC Treasurer's office. More info [here](#).

Voter Information: You can find your current information on the [NC Voter Lookup page](#).

Free Property Tax Assistance Services



Do you need help with your property taxes? The [Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy](#) is providing free assistance to help homeowners prepare their NC property tax relief applications. Call **980-256-7952** or visit their website to learn more [here](#).

Contact Our Office

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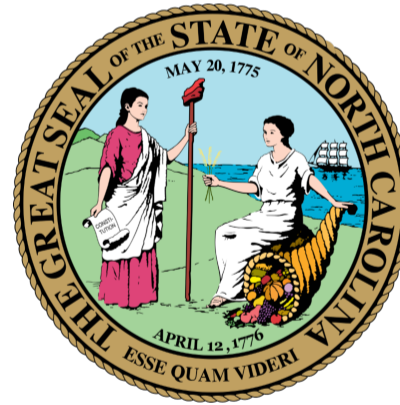
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How can we help you? Let us know and [reach out](#) to our office! We want to hear from you.

Senator Natasha Marcus | [Website](#)



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