

Latest Updates from the NCGA



From Sen. Natasha Marcus <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
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Date 2024-05-03 16:27

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NC Senate District 41



NC Senate District 41 Newsletter

May 3, 2024

Bills Introduced & Co-Sponsored



The 2024 Legislative Short Session has begun. Here are the bills I have introduced and co-sponsored this week. You can find a full list of the bills I have supported this biennium [here](#).

Introduced Bills:

- **[SB791](#), Study & Abate Ocular Melanoma/Funds.** Appropriates \$200,000 to ECU Department of Public Health to study and abate ocular melanoma in Northern Mecklenburg County.
- **[SB792](#), Create Public App. for Reporting Threats.** Directs DPS to develop a plan to create a digital application that will encourage and allow people to quickly and anonymously report tips regarding threats to public safety.
- **[SB796](#), Funds for Smithville CommUNITY Coalition.** Appropriates \$3 million for the Smithville CommUNITY Coalition for the protection of the historically African American neighborhood in Cornelius.
- **[SB831](#), Menstrual Products Sales Tax Exemption.** Exempts menstrual products from the state sales tax.
- **[SB854](#), Protect Access to In Vitro Fertilization.** Establishes the right to access assisted reproductive technology for couples struggling with infertility. Appropriates funding for Medicaid's [Baby Love Program](#), which aids in childbirth education, provides health and behavior intervention, and allows medical home visits.
- **[SB859](#), Redirect Crisis Pregnancy Center Funds.** Redirects funds appropriated to the Carolina Pregnancy Care Fellowship and Crisis Pregnancy Centers to instead support the expansion of evidence-based maternal and infant health programs. Establishes additional reporting requirements for Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) to improve transparency on how these organizations utilize state funds.
- **[SB882](#), Insurance Consumer Protection Study.** Requires the Department of Insurance to study and report on the extent to which insurance consumers are being charged rates above the maximum rates set by the Commissioner of Insurance via Consent to Rate deviations, including the total number of policies subject to a CTR deviation, the rate the consumer was charged and the percentage by which that rate exceeded the maximum that is applicable in North Carolina. Directs DOI to report its findings, including any recommendations for legislation that would improve consumer protections and provide greater transparency, to the General Assembly.
- **[SB892](#), Student Voter ID Grant Program/Community Colleges.** Creates a grant program through which community colleges may apply for funding in order to update the printing of their student identification cards to meet the new requirements to be approved as valid photo IDs for voting by the State Board of Elections. Currently, 35 community colleges have not updated their student IDs to meet the new requirements.

Co-Sponsored Bills

- **[SB778](#), Funds for NC Reading Service.** Appropriates \$107,000 to the North Carolina Reading Service, a nonprofit that delivers news, information, and entertainment using audio technology to the blind and print impaired. These funds would allow the organization to add more employee hours and subscriptions, maintain equipment, and provide supplies for printing.
- **[SB779](#), Misdemeanor Domestic Violence/Prohibit Firearms.** Prohibits those convicted of a misdemeanor from purchasing or possessing firearms and related items, such as permits and ammunition.
- **[SB782](#), Funds for C.W. Williams Community Health Center.** Appropriates \$5.5 million to the C.W. Williams Community Health Center, Inc., a nonprofit organization, to assist in the completion of its full-service community health center located in Mecklenburg County.
- **[SB801](#), Healthy and Safe Students in Every School.** Requires at least one nurse and an emergency supply of naloxone nasal spray in every school, and appropriates the funding to make these requirements possible.
- **[SB814](#), Healthy Students - A Nurse in Every School.** Requires at least one nurse in each public school beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, and appropriates \$89,000,000 in recurring funds to increase the School Health Personnel Allotment in order to make this requirement possible.
- **[SB817](#), Restore Educator Longevity.** Restores annual longevity pay for teachers and instructional support personnel at the following rates:
 - 1.5% of base salary for 10-14 years of State service
 - 2.25% of base salary for 15-19 years of State service
 - 3.25% of base salary for 20-24 years of State service
 - 4.5% of base salary for 25 or more years of State service
- **[SB818](#), Restore Master's Pay for Teachers & ISP.** Reinstates Master's pay for educators and instructional support personnel.
- **[SB819](#), School Psychologist Omnibus.** Increases compensation for school psychologists by \$650 across the board and by 12% of their monthly salary for those with a Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential; creates a grant program so that public schools may receive funding through DPI to recruit psychologists; establishes an internship program for school psychologists in public school units; creates a virtual school psychology training program hosted by

Appalachian State University; and increases funding for school psychologist training programs at several constituent institutions of The University of North Carolina to support the school psychology programs at those institutions with the goal of doubling the number of school psychologists.

Charlotte in Mourning



I joined the Mecklenburg Delegation in signing this letter mourning the loss of the four law enforcement officers whose lives were taken earlier this week:

The undersigned members of the Mecklenburg Delegation to the NC General Assembly express their deepest condolences to the families, friends, and colleagues of the law enforcement officers whose lives were taken in the line of duty on Monday, April 29th. Their sacrifice will not be forgotten in our County or our State, and we can only imagine the pain and loss you are experiencing in their absence.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Officer Joshua Eyer, NC Department of Adult Corrections Officers Sam Poloche and William Elliot, and Deputy US Marshall Thomas Weeks were doing their duty and risking everything to keep our community safe when they were struck down in a senseless act of violence. It was a stark reminder to the rest of us of a truth that your families lived with every day, that the service of your loved one could get them hurt or killed any day.

In this time of loss, know that we represent hundreds of thousands of constituents whose lives are safer, happier, and more secure because of the work that your loved ones did to protect them from those who would do them harm. All of us owe a deep debt of gratitude to the fallen officers and those who were forced to give them up too soon.

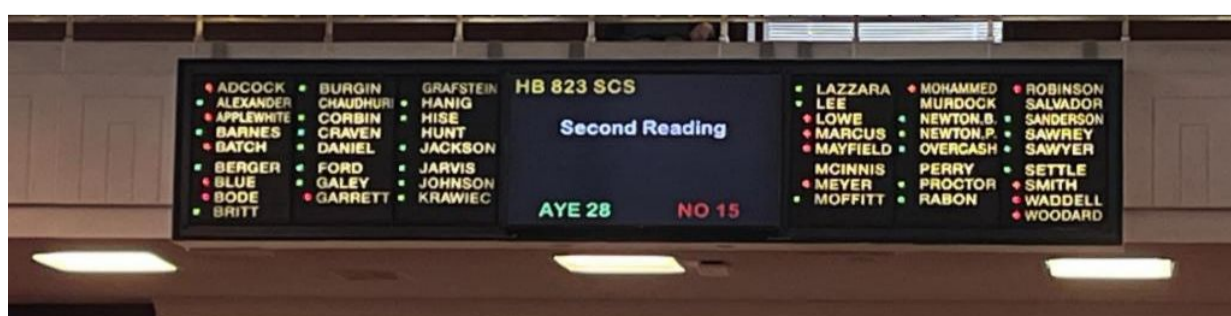
We know that no words can begin to heal the wounds you have been dealt by the death of your loved ones, but we hope that the eternal gratitude and respect of the People of Mecklenburg County will be a balm in your time of loss.

With Gratitude and Respect,

Representative Mary Belk
Representative Becky Carney
Representative Kelly Alexander
Representative Brandon Lofton
Representative Wesley Harris
Representative John Autry
Representative Carolyn Logan

Senator Joyce Waddell
Senator Natasha Marcus
Senator Rachel Hunt
Senator DeAndrea Salvador
Senator Mujtaba Mohammed

Updates on Noteworthy Votes



Below are the noteworthy bills I voted on over the past two weeks. You can find a complete list of bills I voted on [here](#).

Key bills on which I voted NO:

- **HB10, Require Sheriffs to Cooperate with ICE.** This bill requires cooperation between all North Carolina sheriffs and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). While current state law requires sheriffs to try and determine the legal status of people they arrest and inform ICE, it does not require them to honor ICE detainer requests. These detainer requests place a significant burden on local sheriffs, will lead to decreased justice for victims by deporting perpetrators before they can be brought to justice, increase racial profiling of Hispanic drivers, and discourage undocumented immigrants from contacting the police. Learn more [here](#).
- **HB823, Eliminate School Choice Program Waitlists.** Appropriates an additional \$200 million of taxpayer money to go to the wealthiest families (top 2 income tiers) to help pay private school tuition this year, on top of the \$400 million already going to the "Opportunity Scholarship" program this year. There is no income cap on the availability of private school vouchers anymore. The bill obligates the taxpayers to spend \$5 billion on private school vouchers by 2032. Learn more [here](#).

Private School Vouchers: \$5 Billion Price Tag



On Thursday, I addressed the Senate as HB823, Eliminate School Choice Program Waitlists, came to a vote. I made the point that 70% of the vouchers funded in this bill will go to families of four with incomes between \$115,000- \$259,750, and 23% will go to families of four with incomes of more than \$259,700 a year. The lowest-income families have already had their private school tuition funded; this bill is not meant to help them in any way. That's why I called this bill welfare for the wealthy and why I oppose it.

Table 1 : Unfunded FY 2024-25 Priority Applicants by Tier

	FY 2024-25 Award Value	Income Range Calculation	Income Range for FY 2024-25 (Family of 4)	Unfunded Awards
Tier 1	\$7,468	100% or less free and reduced-priced lunch level	\$0 to \$57,720	0
Tier 2	\$6,722	100% to 200% free and reduced-priced lunch level	\$57,720 - \$115,440	16,068
Tier 3	\$4,480	200% to 450% free and reduced-priced lunch level	\$115,440 - \$259,750	26,333
Tier 4	\$3,360	450% or more free and reduced-priced lunch level	\$259,750 or more	12,481
Total				54,882

Source: State Education Assistance Authority

Use of taxpayer money to pay the private school tuition bills for the wealthiest families is especially wrong when we know that so many urgent needs are left unfunded, in public schools, childcare, and more. Private schools are largely unaccountable because the NCGA refuses to require teachers to be licensed, students to be taught any basic curriculum, students to be admitted without discrimination, or testing and reporting to assess whether students are learning.

This bill will further undermine our public schools and is antithetical to our Constitutional obligation to provide every child in our state with a sound, basic education. I voted NO and urged my colleagues to do the same. The bill passed on a party line vote of 28-15.

Senate Judiciary Committee Updates



The following noteworthy bills were discussed in the Senate Judiciary Committee over the past two weeks:

- **HB10, Require Sheriffs to Cooperate with ICE.** See "Updates on Noteworthy Votes" Section for details. Learn more [here](#).

Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee Updates



The following noteworthy bills were discussed in the Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee over the past two weeks:

- **HB823, Eliminate School Choice Program Waitlists.** See "Updates on Noteworthy Votes" Section for details. You can read about some of the questions I raised during the committee meeting [here](#).

Priorities And Challenges This Legislative Session: Interview with Rob Schofield

NC NEWSLINE

As the short session began, I recorded an interview with NC Newsline's Rob Schofield to discuss some of the primary challenges the General Assembly will be facing. These issues include:

- **K-12 education.** North Carolina's teacher retention and recruitment problems must be addressed. Last school year, 11.5% of teachers left their roles, and the attrition rate for beginning teachers was higher than the overall rate, at around 15%. Learn more [here](#).
- **Childcare.** It is imperative that we replace the money we are losing from the federal American Rescue Plan for childcare subsidies. Children need a safe place to exist while parents are working, and childcare is not affordable without some government investment.
- **Election Security.** 60 County Board of Elections Directors have left office since 2019 due to a lack of support, constant changes in election laws, retirements and harassment. The Board of Elections IT system used to register voters and run elections is extremely outdated. Investments are needed to ensure safe and secure elections.
- **The eCourts System.** The rollout of the eCourts System has been difficult for many of the counties currently using it. Before introducing it to additional counties, we must address a number of issues with the program, such as redundancies, the disclosure of victim information, and software bugs.
- **Increases in Insurance Rates.** There are a number of hikes in insurance rates, such as those involving mobile homes, that have been proposed in the last few months. While climate change can be cited as part of the reason for these increases, insurance companies are making record profits.

You can listen to the full interview [here](#).

State Board of Elections: Signature Verification Pilot Program Report



As a member of the Joint Elections Oversight Committee, I received a legislative report from North Carolina's State Board of Elections regarding the new absentee ballot signature verification pilot program. Some of the most salient details from the report are below:

- The pilot's scheduled date to report findings to the General Assembly was May 1, 2024.
- Due to the pilot's time constraints, the State Board received guidance from the Department of Information Technology recommending an invitation-for-bid (IFB) procurement process, which does not typically take as long to complete as a traditional request-for-proposal (RFP) procurement process.
- Once the IFB was published, three vendors bid on the project. However, none of the vendors could meet the requirements in the bid.
 - Two vendors indicated it would be months before they could even get their product to the 10 county boards. This timeframe was not workable given the requirement to provide a report to the legislature by May 1, 2024.
 - One of these two vendors could not accept absentee ballots of the size used in North Carolina
 - The third vendor could meet the necessary timeframe but did not have a feature to automatically eject a ballot envelope where the signature does not match the signature on file.
 - Since mid-March, the State Board has identified and met with a potential vendor, and final contract negotiations are underway.

Governor's Budget Briefing

Securing North Carolina's Future

Fiscally sound, responsible budget

- Cuts tax burden for middle class families, small businesses
- Maintains strong reserves

Provides opportunity for North Carolinians to thrive and addresses most pressing needs

- Public education
- Child care and early education
- Stable state labor force
- Workforce and economic development
- Natural resources, resiliency

Last week, I received a briefing on the Governor's budget adjustment recommendations for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. Some highlights include:

- Robust investments in public education for teacher pay and funds to build new schools
- State employee retention
- Addressing the childcare availability cliff
- Reducing the unemployment insurance tax
- Increases in wages for direct care workers and Medicaid reimbursement
- Income tax reductions for low and middle-income earners.
- Reinstatement of the Land Conservation Tax Credit

The Governor's recommendations are grounded in "[an opportunity to build on our state's momentum](#)" by committing to a better-educated future through public schools, strengthening family care for working families, recognizing the talent of state employees, stimulating job growth and business investments, and protecting our natural resources and communities for the future. You can learn more about the budget by scanning the QR code below or visiting the website of the [Office of State Budget and Management](#).



New Regulations on PFAS In Drinking Water



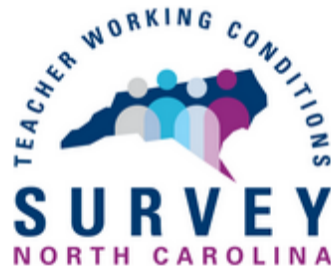
Last month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced its first-ever drinking water standards to protect people against per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), or toxic "forever chemicals." The harm posed by PFAS is undeniable; they do not break down in nature or in the human body and are incredibly toxic to people, and the impacts from widespread contamination are largely unknown. Despite this, PFAS are used in a number of everyday items and have been dumped, unmonitored and uncontrolled, into waterways and groundwater for decades. **These dump sites are used as the source of drinking water for millions across the United States.**

The new standard creates a maximum contaminant level goal (MCLG), which is non-enforceable, and an enforceable maximum contaminant level (MCL) for each of the six most common PFAS. These requirements are as follows:

- For PFOA and PFOS:
 - The MCLG will be zero. There is no level of exposure to these carcinogenic contaminants that does not risk one's health and safety.
 - The MCL will be set at 4.0 parts per trillion each for PFOA and PFOS. This standard will reduce exposure to these substances from drinking water to the lowest levels that are feasible for effective implementation.
- For PFNA, PFHxS, and "GenX Chemicals," the MCLGs and MCLs at 10 parts per trillion.
- PFAS are often found together in mixtures. Research shows these mixtures may have combined health impacts. As a result, the EPA will set a limit for any mixture of two or more of the following PFAS: PFNA, PFHxS, PFBS, and "GenX Chemicals" through the use of a Hazard Index calculation.

Public water systems will have five years to comply with the MCLs. For the first three years of the implementation process, initial PFAS monitoring will be conducted through the installation of PFAS filtration systems. Once that data has been collected, two years are allotted for capital improvements if the numbers recorded are extreme. The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has already worked to assess PFAS levels in water systems across the state. **Their data shows that over 300 water systems in North Carolina have PFAS levels that will exceed the new federal standards.** 42 of these water systems belong to municipal utilities that serve a combined three million North Carolinians. While none of these are in Mecklenburg County, there are several sites in Mecklenburg that did report amounts of PFAS under the threshold. You can examine the full list of water systems monitored by DEQ [here](#) through the interactive map. Learn more [here](#).

Survey Results: Working Conditions for North Carolina Educators



Results are in for the biannual [North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey](#). 102,082 of the 119,000 teachers and student support personnel who were candidates for the survey responded, and 96% of schools met a minimum threshold of at least 50% participation to generate usable data. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools had a response rate of 69.22%. Some of the details of the results are below:

- Survey Demographics
 - 59% of respondents were experienced educators with 11 years of experience or more.
 - 25% of respondents were mid-career educators, with 4-10 years of experience.
 - Nearly 16% were beginning teachers.
- Retention
 - Roughly 80% of respondents indicated they plan to continue teaching at their current school next year.
 - About 12% of respondents said they plan to continue in an education role at a different school.
 - Less than 6% said they planned to leave education entirely or retire.

While 88% of educators indicated that they plan to remain teaching in North Carolina, 2023 saw the highest turnover rate in schools across the state in the last two decades. 11.5% of the state's 90,000 traditional public school teachers left their positions, indicating a 42% increase from 2022. Most of these departures were the result of retirements or resignations among first-year teachers. Interestingly, the Teacher Working Conditions survey does not include questions about compensation. Though over 90% of teachers indicated that their school is a good place to work and learn, approximately half of survey participants also noted disorder in classrooms, disorder in unstructured areas, student disrespect of teachers, tardiness/skipping class, and an insufficient amount of non-instructional time. Learn more [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Senator Marcus in Raleigh and in the Community



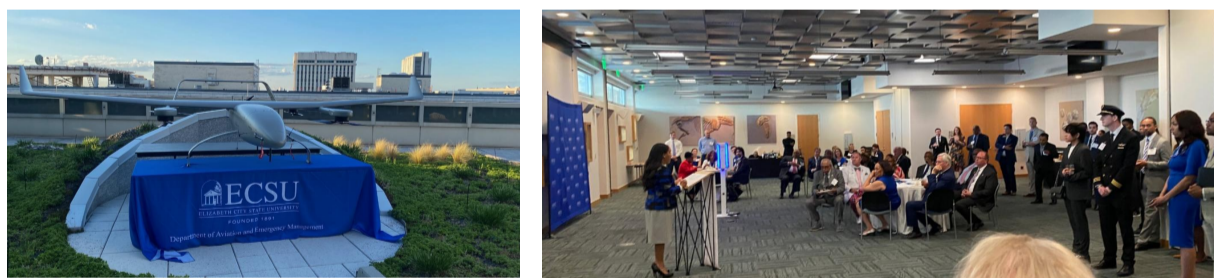
I met with two doctors with the [North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians](#) to discuss the rising cost of medical school, the delays in care generated by prior authorization, and necessary investments in primary care, such as continuing the Primary Care Payment Reform Task Force and supporting the Task Force's recommendations to increase healthcare spending.



I met with representatives of **Johnson C. Smith University**, a historically Black university located in Charlotte on the edge of SD41 to hear their funding and support requests. I plan to attend their graduation ceremony this summer.



It was wonderful to join the Mooresville-South Iredell NAACP for their Freedom Fund Banquet. They are celebrating 89 years of service to the community and advocacy for equity and equality, with a focus on peacebuilding in 2024. Congratulations to all the award winners and to the accomplished keynote speaker, President of HBCU Barber-Scotia College, Chris Rey.



I attended a legislative reception hosted by Elizabeth City State University and learned about popular their drone and pilot programs.

Sun Bucks Solve Child Hunger During the Summer



The USDA has launched a permanent program to provide food assistance to children and families during the summer. SUN Bucks will provide grocery-buying benefits to qualifying families with school-aged children during the summer months when schools are on summer break. SUN Bucks will be issued to EBT cards that families can use to purchase nutritious food. Beginning in summer 2024, families will receive \$120 per eligible child for the summer period. More details about eligibility, issuance dates, and frequently asked questions will become available [here](#) as it is released. Some families will have to apply for the program, but many students will automatically qualify. Children will automatically qualify if they already participate in any of the following programs:

- Free or Reduced-Price (FRP) meals at school because they have an approved FRP application at school, or
- Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, food stamps), or
- Work First (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), cash assistance), or
- Medicaid with household income below 185% of the federal poverty level, or
- Foster care.

Public Input Taken on Red Line Project



In the next ten to fifteen years, Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) plans to complete the Red Line Project, which would connect north Mecklenburg County and south Iredell County to uptown Charlotte. In April, CATS held two meetings to explain the project's history, how the scope of the project has changed, how the commuter rail could benefit the community, and to discuss the current progress of the project. Following Norfolk Southern's policy change on passenger rails in 2013, discussions regarding the project halted between the railway and the City of Charlotte. While there have been some setbacks as a result of the time it has taken to return to project planning, there have also been changes to Charlotte that will be beneficial to the Red Line, such as the existence of the new Charlotte Gateway Station.

The Red Line would help to reduce traffic along I-77, but wouldn't be ready until 2034 at the earliest due to changes in project development, the design phase, engineering, construction, environmental studies, and the need to acquire property. Residents can submit feedback on the project by emailing RedLine@publicinput.com or by calling **855-925-2801** and using project code **1752**. Learn more [here](#) and [here](#).

Financial Update on the State's General Fund

Beginning Cash, Friday, April 19	13,071,043,378.95
Add Receipts:	
Tax and Non-Tax Receipts	2,036,054,944.01
Coronavirus Relief Receipts	0.00
Other Receipts	527,236,453.57
Less Disbursements:	
Payroll	1,229,063,844.40
State Aid	208,928,432.18
Medicaid/Other Provider Payments	172,060,609.67
Tax Refunds/Distributions	293,487,900.17
Debt Service	0.00
Coronavirus Relief Transfers Out	0.00
General Operating	384,316,939.27
Ending Cash, Friday, April 26	13,346,477,050.84
Less Reserved Cash:	
Due to Local Governments – Sales and Use Tax Payable	843,729,421.56
Other Reserves	59,381,037.93
American Recovery Plan Act Reserve	10,397,750.98
Carry Forward Reserve	243,075,367.20
Clean Water Drinking Water Reserve	0.00
Coronavirus Capital Projects Reserve	0.00
Coronavirus Relief Reserve	0.00
Earthquake Disaster Recovery Reserve	0.00
Economic Development Project Reserve	744,450,000.00
Federal Infrastructure Match Reserve	121,758,723.00
Housing Reserve	0.00
Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Reserve	56,825,564.40
Information Technology Reserve	410,307,521.00
Local Fiscal Recovery Reserve-ARPA	0.00
Local Govt Coronavirus Relief Reserve	0.00
Local Project Reserve	0.00
Medicaid Contingency Reserve	726,512,736.00
Medicaid Transformation Reserve	60,642,170.00
NC GREAT Reserve	0.00
NC Innovation Reserve	0.00
Opioid Abatement Reserve	35,030,248.56
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	4,683,216.00
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	669,444,758.49
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, April 26	3,321,787,421.74

The Office of the State Controller (OSC) released the General Fund Cash Watch numbers for the week ending Friday, April 26. 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 \$3.321 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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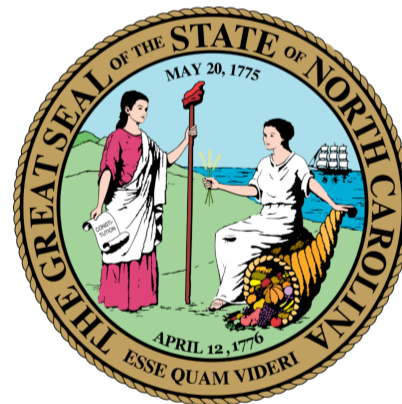
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How can we help you? Let us know and [reach out](#) to our office! We want to hear from you.

Senator Natasha Marcus | [Website](#)



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