

SPAM Latest Updates from the NCGA



From Sen. Natasha Marcus <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>
Reply-To <natasha.marcus@ncleg.gov>
Date 2024-11-01 16:39

Natasha **MARCUS**

NC Senate District 41



NC Senate District 41 Newsletter

November 1, 2024

Special Session on Hurricane Helene



On Thursday, October 24, the North Carolina General Assembly held a special session to vote on additional Hurricane Helene relief. A complete list of bills I voted on this session can be found [here](#).

Summary of SB743, Disaster Recovery Act of 2024 - Part II:

Additional funding for counties and schools in the declared disaster area:

- Increases state matching funds from \$250 million to \$325 million, which will generate an anticipated \$2.9 billion in federal receipts
- Provides additional \$5.5 million to local governments to help with federal financial aid applications, support planning and permitting assistance, and build capacity for building and trade inspections
- \$50 million for repair and renovation of school facilities
- \$5 million for technology replacement in schools
- \$5 million for school nutrition food, supplies, and equipment loss
- \$5 million for mental health services in public schools for students and staff
- \$25 million to DHHS for mental health services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- \$12 million for Local Health Dept. support
- \$20 million for the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, operated by the Division of Child and Family Well-Being in DHHS. Federal D-SNAP benefits estimated to exceed \$200 million
- \$10 million to Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes
- \$9 million in utility assistance to provide energy assistance to low-income households
- \$3 million net to Child Welfare Essential Services
- \$1.4 million to essential services for vulnerable adults to reduce the need for protective services and institutionalization
- \$50 million to support small businesses via loans with authorized lenders
- \$5 million for tourism promotion
- \$100 million for water/wastewater infrastructure repair
- \$7 million to DEQ to provide technical assistance for the assessment and design of water and wastewater infrastructure repair
- \$22 million for underground storage tank repair
- \$10 million to supplement existing federal funds for weatherization services
- \$5 million for floodplain mapping
- \$100 million for Local Government cash flow loans
- \$500,000 to pay line-of-duty death benefits
- Colleges/College Students
 - \$10.5 million for community college students to help pay tuition, fees, and emergency expenses affecting a student's ability to remain enrolled
 - \$5 million for tuition grants to affected community colleges
 - \$1.250 million for additional mental health support to community college students
 - \$5.5 million for tuition grants to UNCA students
 - \$5 million for emergency grants to UNCA students
 - \$5 million for unmet needs not covered by insurance or available federal aid to repair and renovate capital facilities in the UNC system
 - \$1 million for emergency grants for private college students

The Governor's Recommendations estimate that the state should provide \$3.629B for repairs in all categories (Economy, Housing, Utilities and Natural Resources, Transportation, Agriculture, Government and Recovery Ops, Education, Health and Human Services, and Other Disasters). **The Governor and Sen. Julie Mayfield from Buncombe County emphasized the need for a rapid response to the needs in Western NC**, as residents and businesses are desperate and long delays will be devastating.

In addition to the new funding provided by SB743, **a few changes were made to accommodate students, such as calendar flexibility and a provision regarding displaced charter school students.** I asked the bill sponsor, Sen. Michael Lee, about Section 4A.2 of SB743, which requires the readmission of displaced charter school students in the counties in the affected areas if they withdraw due to the impacts of Helene.

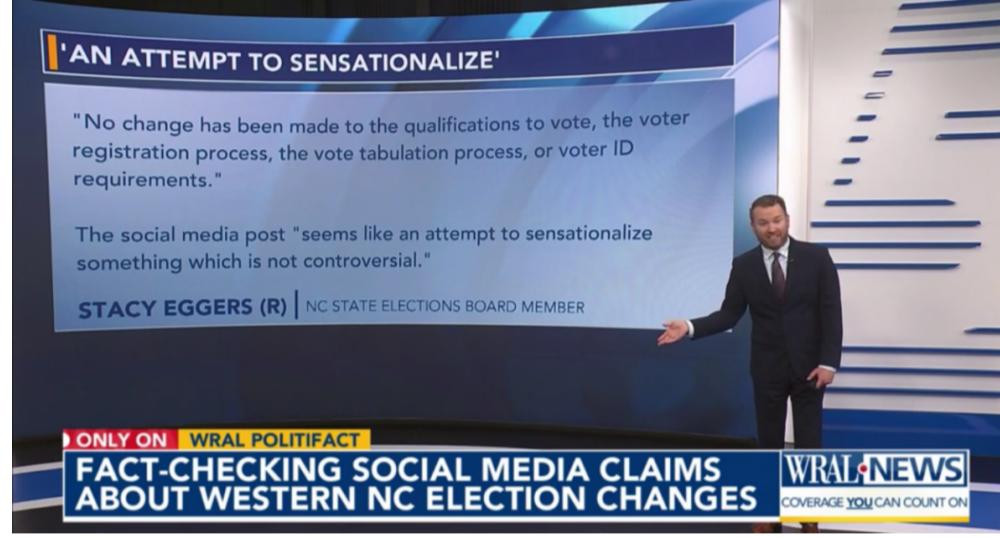
I requested clarification about whether the charter school is permitted to fill the open spot and, if so, what happens when the displaced student returns, either later this school year or the following year. Sen. Lee did not answer the question, saying if that were to happen the charter school "will have to work that out." As a result of this bill, there will likely be two students promised the same spot. I asked if the charter school has an enrollment cap if it will be lifted to

accommodate that extra student. He said it would not. Also, many charter schools are at their max enrollment already. It's not clear to me how the school is supposed to "work it out." That question remains unanswered and may need to be addressed in the future.

I voted YES and the bill passed unanimously.

You can learn more about the current legislative efforts and what will likely be needed to assist schools in the region [here](#). You can see a letter to the NCGA from a coalition of organizations seeking more equitable recovery efforts [here](#).

Legislative Highlight: Election Law Changes in Helene-Impacted Counties



In addition to SB743, we passed a bill to accommodate voters impacted by Hurricane Helene. [**SB132**](#) authorized and required certain counties to add early voting sites for the last week of early voting. This bill requires a minimum of at least one voting site for every 30,000 registered voters. The county boards of elections of Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey County were required to review their Plan for Implementation for compliance with the requirement and add early voting sites as needed to meet this new requirement. **This legislation passed the Senate unanimously and was designed to make voting more accessible to those in Western North Carolina.**

The first Disaster Recovery Act of 2024, [**HB149**](#), which passed unanimously in our October 9th special session, also contained **provisions to make voting more accessible for those affected by the disaster**. With so many North Carolinians displaced by the storm, polling sites closed, and roads made untraversable due to flooding and landslides, the following changes were made for the November 2024 election:

- Chief judges, judges, assistants, student election assistants, ballot counters, poll observers, and staff to early voting sites who are registered voters of the State can be appointed without regard to precinct or county of residence.
- By bipartisan majority vote, one of the 25 county boards of elections impacted can modify the Plan for Implementation for early voting or adjust Election Day precinct polling places. Changes that can be made to the Plan include locations, days, or hours of early voting sites, as well as locations for Election Day polling places.
- Once the county board of elections, by bipartisan majority vote, has established guidelines for the operation of the multipartisan team, multipartisan teams may assist any eligible voter in requesting an absentee ballot, may serve as witnesses to an absentee ballot, or may otherwise assist in the process of absentee voting.
- State employees may serve as precinct officials without taking leave time.
- Allows a voter impacted by the disaster to request a mail-in ballot as late as 5:00 PM on November 4, the day before the election. Usually, this request must be made a week before Election Day.
- Allows a voter impacted by the disaster to return a voted absentee ballot to any county board of elections office and early voting site while open for conducting elections and to the State Board of Elections when that office is open. Usually, voters are limited only to drop off within their county of residence.

I voted YES and these provisions were supported by *both* parties, because they are essential to ensuring that every North Carolinian gets the opportunity to cast their ballot. I believe that democracy works best when all eligible voters participate and want red-leaning counties to have fair access to voting too. However, there have been so many rumors circulating online about the reasons for and likely impact of these changes that WRAL had to publish a [fact check](#) on the changes.

Hurricane Helene Briefing and Updates



Briefing on Governor's Budget Recommendations

Prior to our October 24 Session, State Budget Director Kristin Walker held a legislative briefing regarding Governor Cooper's budget recommendations in the wake of Hurricane Helene. The most salient details are below:

- **Initial damage estimates total approximately \$53 billion.**
 - **About \$14.7 billion of this is in housing losses. Due to low rates of flood insurance coverage, insurance agencies are less likely to cover these damages. FEMA funding is less available to NC because of our outdated building codes. Thus, much of the cost to rebuild and recover will be on the backs of residents.**
 - \$6.7 billion of the damage was to utilities and natural resources. Rerouting homes to sewer systems poses a challenge because of septic tank use in the mountains. Additionally, hazardous waste removal must be addressed.
 - \$3 billion of this estimate accounts for just the six most damaged roads in Western North Carolina
 - At the time of the briefing, there was not yet an estimate for agricultural losses. However, many crops grown in the mountains are specialty crops with 5-10-year growing seasons, which means losses during the storm will continue to impact farmers in Western North Carolina for years to come. Additionally, low rates of flood/crop insurance will shift the cost onto these farmers.
- In many cases, local codes will not permit mobile homes or trailers as a permanent solution to housing loss.
- **Governor Cooper recommends an initial \$3.9 billion for rebuilding infrastructure, homes, businesses, schools, and farms damaged by Hurricane Helene.**
 - \$650 million to address economic losses and damage for non-agricultural businesses and non-profits
 - \$650 million to address housing losses and begin permanent housing construction ahead of federal funding
 - \$578 million to begin repair and cleanup of utilities, natural resources, and other infrastructure
 - \$422 million to address agricultural losses
 - \$420 million to aid in recovery for Tropical Cyclone 8, Tropical Storm Debby, and funds to wrap up homeowner assistance for hurricanes Florence and Matthew
 - \$55 million to address transportation infrastructure damages

Learn more [here](#).

Governor Cooper Issues Unemployment Insurance Executive Order

Earlier this month, Governor Cooper issued an emergency executive order to aid employees and employers impacted by Hurricane Helene. This order increased the amount of weekly unemployment payments and the number of weeks those payments may be received. Weekly benefits increased from \$350 maximum a week to a maximum of \$600 for all eligible workers, including low-income and part-time workers who may have previously only been eligible for \$250 a week. For residents of the 25 western counties, workers now qualify for up to 26 weeks of benefits, as opposed to the standard 12 weeks. Learn more [here](#).

Flooding In and Around Mecklenburg County

I reached out to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety regarding the **flooding near Mt. Island Lake in SD41**, which occurred when Duke Energy opened dams to relieve high water levels on the lakes. I sought to access resources for those constituents. I learned that the Catawba River flood impacted 89 building structures in Mecklenburg County along the Riverside Drive area and lower Mountain Island Lake area. **Initial damages were estimated at \$26 million.**

It was noted in Carolina Public Press that homes on/near Lake Wylie and Mt. Island Lake were devastated by inflow from Lake Norman into both smaller bodies of water. The last time the floodgates at Lake Norman had to be opened to account for such high water levels was in 2019. That event was, until recently, the largest amount of water ever released from Lake Norman and resulted in the flooding of over 100 homes. The water level during Hurricane Helene peaked at 107.9 feet during the storm, exceeding the lake's maximum lake level of 100 feet. 89 structures in Mecklenburg County and 105 in Gaston County were damaged, and four in Mecklenburg were swept away from their foundations and destroyed.

Due to these damages, Mecklenburg was added to the federal disaster declaration, which means survivors are eligible for Individual Assistance. If you believe you qualify for Individual Assistance, you can register [here](#), by calling **800-621-3362**, or by downloading the [FEMA app](#).

New Public Health Vending Machine in Mecklenburg County



Mecklenburg County Public Health has established a new service available to residents through medical supply kiosks. The first is located at the Ella B. Scarborough Community Resource Center (430 Stitt Rd, Charlotte, NC 28213). **These kiosks will hold Naxolone (Narcan), COVID tests, and sexual health kits and are available for free as a way to encourage harm reduction in Mecklenburg County.** To receive the free supplies, residents will register for the medication with their phones for verification. Learn more [here](#).

Roosevelt Wilson Park: Closure, Soil Testing, and New Installations



Beginning October 23, Roosevelt Wilson Park closed temporarily for soil testing and the installation of a new picnic shelter and playground. The soil testing will ensure that no asbestos or other harmful materials are found within the park. The new construction has been designed to accommodate all visitors and promote inclusivity and accessibility for those with disabilities. The Town of Davidson will provide updates on the progress of both projects on its official website and social media channels. Learn more [here](#).

2025 CLT Aviation Academy: Now Accepting Applications



CLT's Aviation Academy allows participants to experience the behind-the-scenes elements of Charlotte Douglas National Airport to better understand the airport's contributions and impacts on the local economy, transportation system, and community. This program is open to community members, public leaders, and private sector leaders from in and around the City of Charlotte. It is limited to 35 participants, and the cost of registration varies depending on whether the applicant registers as a community member (\$350), a public/non-profit sector leader (\$450), or a private sector leader (\$500). **Applications are due by 5:00 pm on Friday, November 8, 2024.** Most class sessions are held from 4:00 -7:30 PM on designated weeknights. Contact Kelly Weston at kweston@centralina.org if you have questions or need more information. Learn more [here](#). Apply [here](#).

Mecklenburg County Homes Program Now Available for Homeowners in Charlotte and Davidson



The Helping Out Mecklenburg Homeowners with Economic Support (HOMES) Program has returned for another season. From **July 1 – Nov. 22, 2024**, Mecklenburg County is partnering with the City of Charlotte and the Town of Davidson to provide **grant funding to qualifying residential homeowners to help address the rising costs of retaining their homes**. Program recipients must apply for consideration annually.

Grant funds will be paid to the Mecklenburg County Tax Collector, **who will reduce the total amount of taxes due for qualifying recipients' primary residence**. The amount granted will equal 35% of the Mecklenburg County tax amount on the last available tax bill, rounded to the nearest dollar, not to exceed \$648.

Applicants must not be participants in any of the following programs:

- North Carolina Homestead Exclusion
- North Carolina Property Tax Homestead Circuit Breaker
- North Carolina Disabled Veterans Exclusion
- North Carolina Present Use Value (PUV) Program

To be eligible:

- The property must be located within Mecklenburg County, NC.
- The property must be the owner's legal primary residence at the time of application and consistently for the past three consecutive years, as verified by recorded legal documents.
- The resident grant recipient's name(s) must be on the recorded deed, title, or life estate.

Paper applications can also be obtained from:

- Department of Community Resources (**3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 1000, Charlotte, NC 28208**)
- County Assessor's Office (**3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 3500, Charlotte NC 28208**)
- Ella B. Scarborough Community Resource Center (**430 Stitt Road, Charlotte, NC 28213**)

Learn more about the program and complete the application [here](#). Contact the HOMES Program at **980-314-4663** or 4homes@mecknc.gov for help with the application process.

Get Free COVID-19 Home Tests



Free COVID tests are available again. [Here is the link to order yours](#). You may also find free tests available for pickup [here](#). Be safe!

Financial Update on the State's General Fund

Beginning Cash, Friday, October 18	11,109,050,158.26
Add Receipts:	
Tax and Non-Tax Receipts	1,373,881,145.20
Coronavirus Relief Receipts	0.00
Other Receipts	459,976,290.74
Less Disbursements:	
Payroll	565,613,824.19
State Aid	35,498,788.60
Medicaid/Other Provider Payments	166,216,230.55
Tax Refunds/Distributions	69,005,711.29
Debt Service	0.00
Coronavirus Relief Transfers Out	0.00
General Operating	186,530,585.28
Ending Cash, Friday, October 25	11,920,042,454.29
Less Reserved Cash:	
Due to Local Governments – Sales and Use Tax Payable	849,064,764.01
Other Reserves	22,325,650.39
American Recovery Plan Act Reserve	34,063,161.12
Carry Forward Reserve	242,611,457.87
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	703,182,000.00
Federal Infrastructure Match Reserve	121,758,723.00
Housing Reserve	0.00
Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Reserve	27,016,891.18
Information Technology Reserve	341,292,868.00
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	0.00
NC GREAT Reserve	0.00
NC Innovation Reserve	0.00
Opioid Abatement Reserve	50,555,235.43
Public School Contingency Reserve	0.00
Public School Need Based Capital Reserve	0.00
Reg Economic Dev Reserve	0.00
Repairs and Renovations Reserve	0.00
Retiree Supplement Reserve	0.00
SCIF General Fund Reserve	0.00
Savings Reserve	4,477,001,113.98
Stabilization and Inflation Reserve	1,000,000,000.00
State Emergency Response/Disaster Reserve	732,567,089.95
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, October 25	2,308,290,763.36

The Office of the State Controller (OSC) released the General Fund Cash Watch numbers for the week ending Friday, October 25. 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 **\$2.308 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.

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](#).

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](#).

Contact Our Office

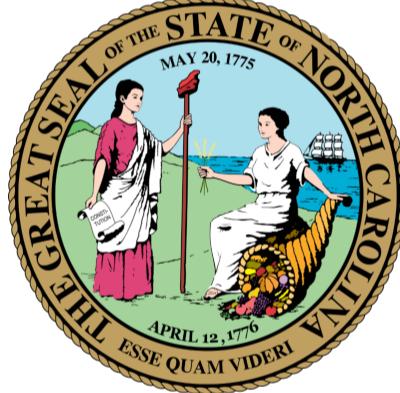
Phone: (919) 715-3050

Email:

Natasha.Marcus@ncleg.gov
Sarah.E.Reynolds@ncleg.gov

Sara

Mailing Address:
300 N. Salisbury Street,
Rm. 519
Raleigh, NC 27603



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

[Senator Natasha Marcus | Website](#)

Sen. Natasha Marcus, District 41 | 300 N. Salisbury Street | Raleigh, NC 27603 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!