

For Immediate Release



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From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate
Mecklenburg County

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Greetings:

We are in the holiday season. Thanksgiving has ended and the Christmas holiday is right around the corner.

Today the Senate was in session. The agenda for session will be HJR 151, Term Limits For Congress; SB 920, Constitutional Amendment - Income Tax Rate Cap Modification; and SB 921, Constitutional Amendment - Require Photo ID for all Voters.

Joyce Waddell

Bills Voted on Today

HJR 151 - A joint resolution applying to congress for an article v convention of the states for the purpose of proposing an amendment to the United States constitution to impose term limits on members of congress. Vote record was 29 Republicans (yes) - 20 Democrats (no).

SB 920 - An act to amend the North Carolina constitution to provide that the maximum tax rate on incomes cannot exceed five percent. Vote record was 30 Republicans (yes) - 19 Democrats (no).

SB 921 - An act to amend the North Carolina constitution to require all voters to present photographic identification before voting, not just those presenting to vote in person. Vote record was 30 Republicans (yes) - 19 Democrats (no).

Aging Plan for North Carolina

In 2020, North Carolina had approximately 198,000 individuals aged 85 and older. By 2040, that number is expected to more than double to 423,000, increasing the demand for long-term care services and supports. This demographic shift highlights the critical need for robust planning and resources to meet the needs of aging adults.

A key legislative proposal is the adoption of a state tax credit for caregiver expenses. Caregivers spend an average of \$7,200 annually on care, making financial support crucial. Additionally, increasing funding for the Home and Community Care Block Grant, which provides non-Medicaid home care services, is a priority. The state's Caregiver Portal, a vital resource for caregivers, requires long-term funding beyond the next year to remain effective.

North Carolina's aging population is already impacting rural counties, where residents over 60 outnumber those under 18 in 88 counties. Long-term care costs, such as \$109,000 annually for a private nursing home room, highlight the importance of planning. Few individuals can afford such expenses, and many are unprepared for retirement.

Housing has emerged as a top concern, surpassing transportation, which was identified as the primary issue a decade ago. Rising property taxes, particularly in gentrifying areas, have become unaffordable for many older adults. Legislative proposals include raising the age of eligibility for property tax relief programs and creating a statewide position to address housing issues for seniors.

I believe that with the aging population expected to grow significantly, long-term planning is essential. North Carolina must address these challenges now to ensure that older adults have access to care, housing, and support systems in the coming decades.

Rule Changes

Senate Bill 382 passed both the House and Senate last week, bypassing the usual committee process and bipartisan debate. The bill was vetoed by the governor, though the legislature has the votes to override a veto. While it provides \$227 million for Hurricane Helene relief, some western North Carolina lawmakers argue the funding is insufficient.

The bill introduces significant changes to election procedures, including adjusting deadlines for returning and counting ballots. Starting January 1, all absentee ballots must be counted on Election Day in a meeting that begins at 5 p.m. and continues until all ballots are tabulated. Under current law, absentee ballots cast before Election Day are counted on Election Day, with additional meetings allowed afterward to finalize counting for provisionals, overseas ballots, and remaining Election Day absentee ballots.

The new law sets stricter timelines for counting provisionals and overseas ballots, requiring provisional ballots to be processed by 5 p.m. on the third day after the election. This change would alter long-standing practices in some counties.

Concerns have been raised by election officials that the administrative changes in the bill could make it difficult for counties to ensure every eligible ballot is counted, particularly in high-turnout elections. The lack of consultation with election staff in drafting these changes has added to these challenges, raising questions about the feasibility of implementing the new requirements.

I hope, in the long upcoming session we can come together to create good solid legislation that benefits all North Carolinians. By including unrelated legislation in bills that are created for something else, we undermine the public's perception of transparency and truth.

NC General Assembly

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