

North Carolina Legislative Update: *Legislators' work is well underway on Jones Street*

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With the 2023-2024 legislative session kicking off in earnest in late January, legislators in both chambers have begun filing bills across many issue areas. While many questions remain, especially related to the potential for a gubernatorial veto with a tight majority in the House, here is a quick look at a few key issues.

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The Budget

The 2023-2024 budget process begins with the House of Representatives, so reporters have focused on House Speaker Tim Moore for answers on when his chamber will pass its version of the budget. According to Moore, leaders are targeting April 6, the Thursday before Easter, and the General Assembly's agreed-upon spring break the week of April 10. But, as with everything in legislative operations, this timeline is fungible and subject to change. Recent reporting has begun sketching out the budget package's key issues, including potential differences between the House and Senate versions. The first issue is the amount of tax cuts, especially in light of previous cuts and the latest revenue forecast showing a \$3.25 billion surplus this year. Significant discussions have also been related to state employee pay raises and other techniques to address hard-to-fill positions in state agencies. Appropriations committees have begun their processes to determine specific agency budget needs, receiving reports from across state government. Over the coming weeks, more information will be known about the overall direction of the budget proposal as more reports are received.



Medicaid Expansion

Medicaid expansion has been a consistent topic of debate between General Assembly leadership and Governor Cooper. North Carolina is among the last to expand the program due to consistent partisan divides. Even amongst supportive Republicans, the issue's specific solutions aren't unified. On February 16, House members passed its version of Medicaid expansion through House Bill 76 by a solid bipartisan margin of 92-22. The bill now moves to the Senate, where the bill's future is uncertain due to disagreement in the specifics of the implementation.

Medical Marijuana

In alignment with numerous other states, legislators in both chambers have repeatedly presented legislation that would authorize prescriptions for medical marijuana for patients with serious illnesses. Senate Rules Committee Chairman Bill Rabon has been a vocal champion of this legislation and introduced the "North Carolina Compassionate Care Act" at the beginning of this session. The bill has received positive votes in Senate committees but is scheduled for a floor vote this week (February 27).

Sports Betting

Much like the issues of Medicaid expansion and medical marijuana, sports betting has been a contentious topic of discussion over previous sessions. Many states have authorized various levels of sports betting, from sports book locations to an increase in online sports betting platforms. The legislation was introduced last session but ultimately was unsuccessful. Sponsors have hinted that they will introduce new legislation soon, but nothing has been filed to date.