



## NCRGEA Government Relations Update

### NCRGEA Government Relations Update #20-12 May 29, 2020

#### Retiree Bonus Bill Introduced

Of paramount interest is [SB 851](#), a bill introduced Tuesday by Sens. Joyce Waddell, Jay Chaudhuri and Valerie Foushee, all Democrats. This bill is a proposal for a one-time \$500 cost-of-living adjustment for every state pensioner, throughout all of the retirement systems. The COLA would be paid out no later than Sept. 1. However, this bill is not considered likely to pass, since it would involve a payout of state funds at a time when the fallout from COVID-19 is causing a severe budget crunch. Any additional money for pensioners in 2020 will have to come out of federal relief funds that may or may not come.

#### House Leadership Introduces Potential COVID-19 Bond Referendum

Much more likely to gain support is a proposal put forward in the House on Tuesday. The Education and Transportation Bond Act of 2020 ([HB 1225](#)), filed by Speaker Tim Moore (R-Cleveland), Jeffrey Elmore (R-Wilkes), John Torbett (R-Gaston) and Michael Wray (D-Northampton) as primary sponsors with 42 co-sponsors, has bipartisan support, but will have to overcome hurdles in order to pass.

The legislation calls for a statewide referendum on a series of bond issues that add up to \$3.1 billion in funding. As the name of the bill suggests, it addresses needs in the state's road system and educational systems. About half of the bonds, \$1.5 billion, would be directed into road projects. Another \$800 million would go toward K-12 school systems, \$600 million to the UNC System of universities, and \$200 million for the state's community college system.

The bonds would provide for much-needed improvements to many North Carolina roadways. The school bonds are devoted to capital projects, meaning that new schools could be built and older facilities upgraded and modernized to better serve students. The new construction would create jobs and the road work would benefit commerce and industry.

A side benefit of the bill is that it provides for upgrades to "technology infrastructure" for all groups of learning institutions. This would not only solve some of the problems that have been noted when educational institutions were forced to transition to online learning as COVID-19 forced shutdowns, but some of the infrastructure upgrades might also be beneficial to the communities the schools, colleges and universities are located in. Improving access to broadband in North Carolina in general is a hot-button issue at the General Assembly.

The bill has significant support, but will have to work its way through some political landmines, both from fiscal conservatives concerned about the budget shortfall, and those who believe it doesn't do enough, to secure passage. Even then, there is no guarantee that Cooper would sign it. We will keep you updated.

#### COVID-19 Related Legislation

While North Carolina emerges from isolation in Phase II of the path back to normalcy, the House and Senate worked on several COVID-19 related issues.

The House Select Committee on COVID-19 introduced two pieces of legislation:

[HB 1229](#) - UI Program Integrity/Temp. ABAWD Time Waivers provides \$2,000,000 to the Unemployment Security Commission to increase security, fraud protection and provides funding to assist in the administration of the Food and Nutrition Service program.

[HB 1228](#) – Satellite Broadband Grants – provides \$4,000,000 to the Department of Information Technology to provide grants to satellite-based provider serving the greatest number of underserved households across the state.

[HB 536](#) Temp Outdoor Restaurants for Outdoor Seating allows restaurants, wineries, distilleries, and breweries to serve alcoholic beverages for on premise consumption at outdoor seating locations, provided the seating capacity is limited to 50% of current indoor seating capacity. Those establishments were allowed to open by executive order of the Governor on Friday, May 22. The bill also allows private bars that do not derive at least 30% of their revenue from the sale of food to serve alcoholic beverages for on premise consumption at outdoor seating locations, provided the seating capacity is limited to 50% of current indoor seating capacity. Private bars are still prohibited from opening and serving beverages indoors. HB 536 was presented to the Governor on Friday, May 29. Many observers speculate that the Governor will veto the bill due to its contradicting his executive orders and appearing to limit local authority. It is noted that the House vote, 65-53, was not enough to override a veto.

This week, the House passed [HB 1169](#) a near unanimous, bipartisan election law bill to prepare for the upcoming elections due to COVID-19. The proposed changes make it easier to vote absentee and provides funding to keep the election process safe. Specifically:

- For the 2020 general election, allow for one witness for the casting of absentee ballots, current law requires two witnesses.
- For the 2020 general election, provides for individuals working as part of multi-partisan teams, and trained and authorized by county board of elections, to assist voters in completing a request form for mail-in absentee ballots, delivering the completed request form to the county board, and serving as a witness in casting of absentee ballots.
- Requires the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Board of Elections to develop guidance on how to safely allow multi-partisan teams to assist registered voters within congregate settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Requires the State Board of Elections to establish by September 1, 2020 an online portal for qualified voters to submit requests for mail-in absentee ballots.
- Appropriates \$13 million to the State Board of Elections to respond to COVID-19.

**Note:** While Voter ID requirement is in state statute, the requirement is under judicial review. It is likely that no Voter ID will be required in November.

Stay Tuned

Richard Rogers  
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