



## NCRGEA Government Relations Update

### NCRGEA Government Relations Update #20-08

May 8, 2020

The top priority for the North Carolina legislature when it convened for its short session was accomplished in a little over a week with the House and Senate agreeing on the 2020 COVID-19 Recovery Act, allocating federal funds to help the State manage and recover from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

After Governor Cooper signed the bill into law on Monday, the rest of the week was anticlimactic but there could be some behind-the-scenes action next week.

The House took action on just five bills between then and Friday but neither chamber voted on any bills. The most significant one was H1061, a bill introduced by Rep. William Richardson (D-Cumberland) on Wednesday to streamline unemployment benefits—an issue that is of great concern right now due to the numbers of workers displaced by COVID-19. The bill, which was sent to Committee that same day, would raise the maximum weekly benefit amount from \$350 to \$450 and base weekly compensation on the person's two *highest-paid* quarters in their base period, rather than the two *most-recent* quarters. The cap on benefits would be extended to 26 weeks. It also would apply more stringent rules to employers using a short-time compensation plan to avoid layoffs.

On Friday Representatives Allen McNeill (R-Moore), James Boles (R-Moore), and Ted Davis (R-New Hanover) and two co-sponsors introduced H1063, a bill that would appropriate \$19.8 million for base station upgrades to the **Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) network**. **VIPER is a system that facilitates mobile voice and data communications network that allows all North Carolina law**

**enforcement and public safety agencies to communicate with little more than the touch of a button.** This bill was also sent to committee the same day.

The Senate also took action on five bills during the week. On Tuesday, S710, sponsored by Senators Chuck Edwards (R-Buncombe), Jim Davis (R-Cherokee) and Vickie Sawyer (R-Iredell) along with seven co-sponsors, is a proposed change to the state's DWI laws that would mandate a minimum one-year prison term for anyone who causes the death of another person while operating a motor vehicle with a license suspended for a DWI conviction, even if they were not impaired at the time of the accident. It was referred to committee.

Other bills proposed and sent to committee during the week would have established the rhododendron as the state shrub, eliminated criminal penalties for violations of Governor Cooper's executive orders related to preventing the spread of the coronavirus, and provided tax credits for milk producers in any quarter where the USDA's market price of Grade A milk didn't meet the production price set by the NC Board of Agriculture.

On Tuesday and Thursday of next week, the House Select Committee on COVID-19 will meet. No further legislation toward COVID-19 is expected in this session, but more than half of the state's funding allocation from the federal CARES Act remains unspent. Legislators intend to see what transpires with the situation in the next few months and will likely pass another coronavirus recovery bill during the summer after discussion and evaluation which is already ongoing.

Stay Tuned!

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