

Legislative Update February 5, 2021

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Article

02.05.2021

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Lawmakers returned to Raleigh this week to continue the 2021 long session and took the first votes on substantive bills. The main issues taken up this week included a COVID-19 funding bill, legislation on K-12 in-person schooling, and a bill to extend the date on a previous ABC permit exemption. More COVID-19 relief is expected in the next few weeks, and preliminary work will soon begin on the budget. The Senate crafts the budget first this year but will have to wait closer to tax filing to have an accurate prediction of revenue numbers.

Bill Action Dates

- March 11: Senate local bill filing deadline
- March 25: House local bill filing deadline
- April 6: Senate public bill filing deadline (does not apply to constitutional amendments, elections bills, or appointments)
- April 20: House filing deadline for non-budget bills
- April 27: House filing deadline for budget bills
- May 13: Crossover deadline for both the House and Senate in which bills must have passed at least one chamber to remain eligible for consideration.

2020 COVID Relief Bill Modifications

Senate Bill 36, 2020 COVID Relief Bill Modifications, is now on the Governor's desk after receiving a unanimous vote in both chambers. The Governor is expected to quickly sign the bill into law. The bill largely makes technical changes to COVID-19 relief bills passed last year and shifts some federal funds around. It extends many dates and reporting deadlines for previous appropriations of federal money to reflect recent federal law changes which granted more time for states to spend COVID-19 stimulus funds. The bill allows parents of school-aged children more time to apply for the \$335 Extra Credit grant. The program application window closed in December 2020 but will now be open until May 31, 2021. The bill also

makes three main appropriations. First, it includes \$95 million to assist health care providers and local governments administering vaccines. Second, the incredibly popular Hope Act, which provides emergency rental assistance to avoid evictions, will receive an additional \$546 million. Third, the bill contains \$1.6 billion for local school districts to cover COVID-19 expenditures and costs as schools prepare for in-classroom instruction.

WRAL: Parents who missed \$335 grants will get another chance

WRAL: Money for vaccinations, schools, renters in NC's latest pandemic relief measure

In-Person Learning Choice for Families

On a largely partisan 29-16 vote, the Senate tentatively-approved Senate Bill 37, which would require local education administrations to offer students in grades K-12 the option of in-person instruction. Current law allows schools to choose from three plans: Plan A with most students in-person; Plan B with some students in-person; and Plan C with no students-in person. Grades 6 through 12 must choose Plan B or C.

Senate Bill 37 does not require parents to opt in to in-person learning, but does give them that option. Schools would also be allowed to modify instructional requirements based on needs and resources and could move to remote learning if COVID-19 exposure leads to insufficient staff available, upon notifying the State Department of Public Instruction.

Bill supporters cite studies that they claim show that COVID-19 exposure rates at schools are lower than the general population and point to in-person instruction being safe when done properly. They also expressed concerns about students' mental health and ability to learn when out of the classroom.

Democrats attempted to amend the bill to give local school administrations more flexibility on when to offer in-person instruction but the amendments failed. Governor Cooper has indicated that he opposes the bill. He does support allowing schools to offer in-person instruction, but believes that decisions need to be local and made on a case-by-case basis.

WRAL: Senate gives initial OK to measure requiring NC schools to reopen during pandemic

House ABC Permit Bill

House Bill 4, Extend ABC Permit Renewal Fee Deferral, would extend the previously-enacted deferral of ABC permit fees. The extension applies to permittees who have been unable to operate due to COVID-19 restrictions and would expire once those restrictions are rescinded or expire. The bill is in response to reports that around 124 ABC permits have been canceled due to nonpayment. Many permitted facilities have been unable to operate or have been forced to operate at a greatly-reduced capacity during the pandemic. The bill also requires the ABC Commission to reinstate inactive permits. The bill passed the House 116-1 and is now in the Senate.

List of All Filed Bills: <https://www.ncleg.gov/Legislation/Bills/WithAction/2021/10>

2020 Summary of Substantive Legislation

The Legislative Analysis Division has published the 2020 Summary of Substantive Legislation, which breaks down new laws by subject matter. Below is a link to the document: <https://www.ncleg.gov/Legislation/SummariesPublication/Subjects/2020/>