

North Carolina Legislative Update - June 5, 2020

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The General Assembly continued its work this week, with the goal of wrapping up the short session by the end of June. Lawmakers traditionally try to finish session by the end of June, but in recent years sessions have spilled over into the fall. The House held committee meetings Wednesday and Thursday, while the Senate was in session from Monday to Thursday.

The state remains under Phase II of Governor Cooper's three-part plan to reopening. Restaurants and hair salons are open at 50% capacity and the stay at home order has been lifted as part of Phase II, spelled out in Executive Order 141. Phase II also limits mass gatherings to no more than 25 people. Several groups, including gyms, have filed lawsuits hoping the courts will allow them to open. On Thursday, Governor Cooper announced he was considering moving the state into a "Phase 2.5" which would ease some restrictions, but not fully move the state into Phase III. The state is expected to move into Phase III at the end of the month or early July.

Reopen Gyms Bill

The Senate rolled out legislation to allow gyms to reopen under Governor Cooper's COVID-19 restrictions. The bill specifies that gyms and personal fitness centers can reopen at 50% capacity, but facilities must follow guidelines to reduce virus spread, and frequently sanitize equipment. Gyms are also allowed to open childcare services at 50% capacity. Committee members heard from various gym owners who explained the economic hardship they are experiencing as a result of being forced to close, spoke to the physical and mental well-being that gyms bring to their customers. The bill has passed the Senate Commerce Committee this week, and is expected to be heard in the Senate Rules Committee and on the Senate floor next week. This bill is similar to bill passed last week that would allow restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries, bars, and clubs to increase their capacity beyond what is allowed under Governor Cooper's executive orders. The bill would allow those establishments to serve up to 50% of their occupancy capacity outdoors. That bill is currently on Governor Cooper's desk. The Governor has expressed concern over both bills, since they would remove his executive authority to respond to potential spikes in

COVID-19 cases.

WRAL: Senate committee votes to overrule Cooper, open gyms

Farm Act

After reaching an impasse between the House and Senate last year, the legislature has finally passed the 2019-20 Farm Act. The bill contained a controversial section that dealt with smokable hemp, which many in the law enforcement community wanted to make illegal. Smokable hemp is one of the more profitable uses of the hemp plant and growers wanted it to remain legal. The bill also contained a controversial section that would expand the agritourism definition to include shooting ranges, which would exempt those ranges from locals zoning rules. Both sections were removed from the bill and it is now on the Governor's desk. The sections remaining in the bill deal with unused utility easements, left turning farm equipment, agricultural outdoor advertising, sweep potato marketing, present use value taxation, swine permitting, and a study on reestablishing the North Carolina Milk Commission and the creation of a tax credit for milk producers.

WRAL: Farm bill, with hemp sections cut after months, clears NC House

Republican National Convention

Charlotte has been planning to host the 2020 Republican National Convention (RNC) this August, but due to COVID-19, that prospect is now up in the air. The RNC and President Trump have asked Governor Cooper to guarantee that they can host their convention in the Spectrum Stadium with the full 19,000 capacity without the requirement to wear masks or comply with social distancing. Governor Cooper has indicated that their request is not feasible or safe given the risks of a virus outbreak. President Trump has threatened to move the convention to another city. Lawmakers are working on legislation to allow the convention, but it would require the RNC, the City of Charlotte and the N.C. Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to agree on how it will be run. That bill is expected to be filed next week, but will likely face heavy opposition from Democrats. Discussions are ongoing about hosting a scaled down version of the convention in Charlotte, while moving other parts of the convention to another city. Republican leaders have criticized Governor Cooper, and point to the \$130 million economic impact that the convention is expected to have.

WRAL: Republicans promise bill to allow full RNC

NC DHHS Guidance

The DHHS has released guidance for business to follow when reopening. Below are links for various businesses and establishments.

- [Interim Guidance for Restaurants](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Large Venue Settings](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Retail Businesses](#)

→ [What Phase 2 Means for North Carolina](#)

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