

## North Carolina Legislative Update, March 5, 2021

03.05.2021

This week, work at the General Assembly continued to focus on COVID-19 issues. In addition, Gov. Roy Cooper announced changes in the state's vaccination program.

### **COVID-19 Response and Relief Bill**

The General Assembly passed a bill (H 196) allocating \$1.7 billion in federal COVID-19 funds for various matters this week. Among other things, the bill allocates over \$100 million to K-12 public school needs and provides \$290 million for higher education emergency relief. It includes another \$40 million to support summer learning programs in addition to education funds approved last month. It is in addition to a bill (S 36) enacted earlier in the session that allocates nearly \$2 billion in federal COVID-19 funds, including \$1.6 billion to help local school districts safely reopen and \$546 million for emergency rent relief.

H 196 provides funds for farms, fisheries, food banks, small business grants, broadband, summer school programs, mental health and substance abuse services, and the state's COVID-19 vaccination system and includes policy provisions that extend flexibility for notaries, video witness testimony, education requirements, and access to vaccines for pharmacies.

### **Opening of K-12 Schools**

Debate about in-person K-12 school instruction continued this week. A Senate vote to override Gov. Cooper's veto of a bill (S 37) on this topic was unsuccessful. The Governor indicated that he was concerned the bill did not mandate schools follow NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) safety guidelines or contain provisions allowing schools to react to changed virus conditions.

The state Board of Education on Thursday adopted a joint resolution with Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt indicating that all school districts should resume in-person learning by the end of March to the fullest extent possible consistent with guidelines in the North Carolina Strong Schools Toolkit promulgated by the NCDHHS.

### **State Budget**

Appropriations Committees continued meeting jointly this week to discuss the state's budget process, existing agency budgets and receive updates from agencies. These joint committee meetings will run through late March and then the Senate appropriators will begin meeting

separately to draft a budget bill as that chamber considers the budget first this year. Press reports indicate that Gov. Cooper may present his budget recommendations during the week of March 8.

### **Changes in COVID-19 Vaccine Timeline**

Gov. Cooper announced this week that additional frontline essential workers in Group 3 will be eligible for vaccinations beginning March 3. He also outlined a timeline for starting Group 4 vaccinations so that beginning on March 24, people at higher risk from COVID-19 due to underlying medical conditions will become eligible to receive a vaccine, as well as people in certain congregate-living settings.

Additional information is available at this link.

For more information, contact a member of the Brooks Pierce Government Affairs Team.

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