

For Immediate Release



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From the Office of Sen. Joyce Waddell, NC Senate
Mecklenburg County

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Greetings:

At the General Assembly
For the Week

The Senate voted on 5 bills on Wednesday. HB 198 - DOT Legislative Changes; HB 237 - Unmasking Mobs and Criminals; HB 591 - Modernize Sex Crimes. Juvenile Justice Modifications; and HB 681 - Interstate Med. Lic. Compact/Mil. Licensure.

The other days of the week, the Senate participated in committee meetings.

Joyce Waddell

Mask Ban

The North Carolina Senate passed a bill aimed at repealing a health and safety exemption to the state's long-standing prohibition on wearing masks in public and toughening penalties for wearing masks while committing other offenses. The bill, introduced as a substitute to existing legislation and endorsed by two committees this week, was approved by a 30-15 vote along party lines on Wednesday afternoon.

A key point of contention surrounding the bill revolves around the removal of the health and safety exemption from the law, which has been in place since 1953. While Republicans argue that the pandemic-era exception is no longer necessary, Democrats contend that penalties for mask-related crimes should be increased separately, without touching the health exemption.

In addition to eliminating the health and safety exemption and imposing harsher penalties for those using masks to conceal their identities while committing crimes, the bill introduces new penalties for participating in demonstrations aimed at obstructing traffic.

I am sure there are proponents for this bill, my concern is that this will be another way for law enforcement to add one more way they can engage the community in unhealthy ways. Those that created and supported this bill would not allow exemptions for medical use and that creates barriers for those who need masks.



Street Cleanup

Senator Waddell participates in a community street cleanup with members of National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), an event to beautify our communities.

Juvenile Justice

Legislation passed through the North Carolina Senate on Wednesday aims to automatically try more young people accused of serious crimes in adult court, revising some of the bipartisan juvenile justice reforms enacted by the General Assembly in late 2019.

Currently, 16- and 17-year-olds accused of serious felonies are transferred to Superior Court after indictment or a probable cause hearing, while prosecutors have discretion to retain cases involving lower-grade felonies in juvenile court.

The bill also introduces a new mechanism for cases to be transferred from Superior Court to juvenile court, with the expungement of adult records, upon mutual agreement between the prosecutor and the defendant's attorney.

Critics, including civil rights and disability advocates, express concerns that the revisions may undermine the benefits of the "Raise the Age" policy, which facilitates access to mental health treatment and support services for young offenders.

The push for the juvenile transfer change stemmed, in part, from the North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys, representing the state's local prosecutors.

This bill creates a thin line between upholding more serious crimes committed by juveniles and unfairly vilifying those that need support and counseling. We are on a slippery slope and I fear we will create unfair and serious repercussions that we cannot reverse.

AI Safety

House Bill 591, passed by both the North Carolina Senate and House, introduces a new offense called sexual extortion. This law prohibits the publication or refusal to delete a nude photo of an individual to coerce them into actions against their will, whether the image is real or generated by AI. Additionally, it criminalizes AI-generated images intended to simulate child pornography.

The bill aims to equip law enforcement with more tools to address similar cases in the future.

Both the House and Senate have approved versions of the bill. The Senate's version must return to the House before potentially reaching The Governor's desk for approval.

In developing legislation for North Carolinians, we must provide safe ways to engage in online platforms and social media.

NC General Assembly

Visit www.ncleg.gov, the official website of the North Carolina General Assembly. Use this website as a tool to track bills, find and communicate with your state representatives, as well as follow chamber activity, meetings and issues before the General Assembly. The 2022 Short Session began on Wednesday, May 18th at 12:00 noon.

Determine Your Legislators

Representation in the NC House, the NC Senate, and the US House is determined by legislative district. Click [here](#) for more information on who your legislators are.

Keep Track of Bills – Interested in tracking bills through the legislative process? <https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/>. Just type in a bill number in the search bar (ex: HB1) at the top of the page.

Bills & Laws - <https://www.ncleg.gov/Legislation>

Legislative Calendar/Watch Committee Meetings

Most committee hearings are broadcast. Keep up with what's happening at the NC General Assembly. See up to date meetings calendar [here](#).



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