

## For Immediate Release



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Greetings:**

At the General Assembly  
*For the Week*

Today, throughout the US we celebrate Memorial Day. This holiday is set aside to honor those veterans and active-duty military members who sacrifice their lives to ensure our safety, as well as those who have given the ultimate sacrifice. We salute our fallen heroes and keep their families who continue to grieve their losses. God bless all who serve and those who have served.

*Joyce Waddell*



***Memorial Day***

*Senator Waddell spoke at a Memorial Day event held by the Omega Psi Phi fraternity.*

**Mask Ban**

The North Carolina Senate voted to repeal a health and safety exception to the state's longstanding ban on wearing masks in public and to increase penalties for wearing a mask while committing a crime. The bill, which was introduced as a substitute to existing legislation last week and quickly moved through two committees, passed in a 30-15 vote along party lines on last Wednesday afternoon. A significant point of contention is the removal of the health and safety exception from the mask-wearing ban that dates back to 1953. Republicans argue that the pandemic-era exception is no longer needed, while Democrats believe that lawmakers should only increase penalties for using masks to commit crimes and leave the health exception intact.

In addition to repealing the health and safety exception and increasing penalties for wearing a mask to conceal identity while committing a crime, the bill introduces new penalties for participating in demonstrations intended to block traffic.

I believe that wearing a mask in these times of illness is a right that each person should be able to do. Many wear a mask to protect themselves and I will always support this.



## ***Voting***

*Senator Waddell spoke at New Hope Baptist Church regarding the importance of registering to vote.*

## **Criminal Records**

In 2021, North Carolina legislators enacted a law designed to automatically erase arrest records in cases where individuals were found not guilty or charges were dismissed. However, unintended consequences emerged during the rollout, leading lawmakers to pause the implementation twice. Now, conservative groups and others are advocating for its reinstatement, arguing that it will help those affected by arrest records find employment and housing more easily.

In March 2023, the state Senate unanimously passed a new bill incorporating recommendations from a group of 16 criminal justice leaders, including representatives from the state Conference of District Attorneys, the Second Chance Alliance, and the State Bureau of Investigation.

Problems included individuals remaining in jail because paperwork required for their release was destroyed, as noted by Eddie Caldwell of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association. Public defenders also faced difficulties calculating their hours for payment, and acquitted defendants struggled to prove dismissed charges to immigration officials, potential employers, or housing managers.

The "Second Chance Act" of 2020, passed amid a bipartisan push for criminal justice reform following George Floyd's murder.

The state court system now has more capacity to manage record needs, thanks to the new eCourts system—a fully digital court records platform. Despite criticism from some, including the state's district attorneys, eCourts is expected to resolve previous expunction issues by allowing court officials to seal records, making them accessible only to approved officials.

Automatic erasures is a great idea for those who have served their time. This allows people who have had issues with the criminal justice system the ability get a second chance at starting again.



## ***Senate Floor Prayer***

*Senator Waddell delivers a prayer at the beginning of session on Thursday.*

## **NC General Assembly**

Visit [www.ncleg.gov](http://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.



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