



## INTRODUCTION

This week, most activity at the General Assembly was halted by the snow and ice that covered most of the state and made safe passage to Raleigh impossible for many members. Policy committees were cancelled from Tuesday through Thursday, and both chambers cancelled session on Tuesday, a rare event. Despite the weather, there was some activity, including the filing of over a dozen new bills and the referral to committee of dozens more. Among those filed were a measure to allow voters without photo ID to cast a absentee ballot which currently does not require an ID (a sign the debate on the state's new Voter ID law is far from over) and 6 separate bills that would allow certain school systems across the state more flexibility in adopting a school calendar, either by removing the existing requirement that systems calendar the opening date for students be no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26, and the closing date no later than the Friday closest to June 11, or by linking the opening or closing dates to those of a local community college (at least a dozen of these bills have been filed since the beginning of session).

While the school calendar flexibility bills filed in the House were referred to that chamber's Education K-12 policy committee, those filed in the Senate were referred to the Ways and Means Committee, a 3-member panel that literally never meets. While a common saying among legislative insiders is that the Rules committees are where bills go to die, in fact the Rules committees more often serve as a clearinghouse for bills that are on hold for various reasons, do not fit neatly in another category, or are fast-tracked by leadership for approval. The Senate Ways and Means Committee, by contrast, is a true legislative black hole, so much so that a running joke – both among the Democrats before 2011 and since adopted by the Republican majority – is to announce on the floor Ways and Means will not meet next week. Such an announcement this week by Senate Rules Chairman Tom Apodaca elicited hearty laughter from insiders and confused glances from those newer to the process. The laughter was not likely shared by the sponsors of bills currently stuck in that committee, however, including Democratic Sen. Jeff Jackson of Mecklenburg, who saw his independent redistricting bill sent to Ways and Means while the House version, sponsored by members of both parties and announced at a well-attended press conference, was sent to the House Committee on Elections.



## NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS



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Despite the reception his redistricting bill received, Sen. Jackson had if not the best, certainly the most newsworthy, week of any member. While the snowfall led to cancelled committees and kept most members away from the General Assembly, Sen. Jackson had the building essentially to himself on Tuesday, and used the time to conduct (at least on social media) a legislative session of one. His Twitter and Facebook posts about the measures he “passed” by a 0-1 vote (essentially progressive Democratic wish list) caught the attention of national press and were featured on MSNBC and various news outlets over the next day. While none of the proposals he mentioned have much hope of passage this session, the publicity generated helped confirm Sen. Jackson as one of the rising stars of the Democratic minority.

With the weather finally improving, we expect next week to feature packed committee calendars, and for the pace of bill filings to pick up considerably. We will be there as we were this week, regardless of the weather, and will keep you posted as things unfold.

## **BILLS OF INTEREST**

HOUSE BILL 92, Nonpartisan Redistricting Commission, would establish a nonpartisan redistricting process, and require the Legislative Services Office to acquire, review, and evaluate appropriate information, review and evaluate available facilities, and develop programs and procedures in preparation for drawing congressional and legislative redistricting plans on the basis of each federal census. The Legislative Services Office would use information obtained from the Census Bureau regarding the State’s geographic and political units and population data to prepare congressional and legislative districting plans, and would provide identical bills that include the districting plans to the Senate and House to be brought to a vote. The bill includes redistricting standards, provides for a five-member Temporary Redistricting Advisory Commission, and sets out the duties of the Commission, which would include conducting public hearings and summarizing and reporting those comments to the General Assembly prior to their vote on the redistricting bills. **Introduced by Representatives Stam, McGrady, Hardister, and G. Martin, and referred to the House Elections Committee.**

## **BILL UPDATES**

SENATE BILL 14, Acad. Standards/Rules Review/Coal Ash/Funds, was amended in the House Appropriations Committee to provide that the \$2 million appropriated to the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Central Management and Support, for the health information exchange for the 2014-15 fiscal year is nonrecurring, and limit the use of these funds as specifically provided. DHHS would allocate to the North Carolina Health Information Exchange, Exchange (NC HIE) an amount determined by DHHS and the State Chief Information Officer (SCIO) to be reasonably necessary to fund certain monthly operating expenses incurred or encumbered by the NC HIE from February 1, 2015, to June 30, 2015. The NC HIE could not use any portion of these funds for expenses incurred or encumbered prior to February 1, 2015, or for any other purpose not expressly authorized. DHHS also could use these funds to (1) make debt payments on behalf of the NC HIE which are determined by DHHS and the SCIO to be reasonably necessary to sustain the operations of the software vendor, and (2) conduct the required assessment.

By May 1, 2015, DHHS would submit: (1) a report on all State appropriations allocated to or on behalf of the NC HIE pursuant to this section, and (2) an assessment of the existing functionality,

structure, and operation of the HIE Network. By September 1, 2015, DHHS would submit to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committees on Health and Human Services and Information Technology: (1) an assessment of the best business model and operational structure for administering a statewide health information exchange network in this State; and (2) a recommendation as to whether the NC HIE should continue to oversee and administer the State's HIE Network. **The bill as amended was approved by the House Appropriations Committee and will next be considered by the full House.**

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