



February 17, 2025

## **Old North State Report – Feb. 17, 2025**

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

**February 19-21, 2025**

[NC Healthcare Association 2025 Winter Meeting](#)

**February 24, 2025**

[IIANC Thinkers Lunch: Political Reporters Roundtable](#)

**February 25, 2025**

[NC Chamber - Government Affairs Reception](#)

### LEGISLATIVE NEWS

#### **NEW LEGISLATION ADDS MORE FUNDS TO HURRICANE HELENE RELIEF BILL**

On Tuesday, House lawmakers added funds for renters and farmers in the new Hurricane Helene relief bill. These changes were made during committee amendments as the General Assembly continues to negotiate state aid for western North Carolina. [House Bill 47](#) proposes \$500 million in new spending.

The bill includes \$10 million for rental assistance to help keep residents in their homes if federal funds are depleted. It also allocates \$75 million for aiding farmers who lost crops and livestock due to the storm, in addition to \$75 million for the Department of Agriculture to repair damages.

Other additions to the bill include \$55 million for local government grants for small business repairs, \$5 million for tourism marketing, allowing inmates to clean up debris, and permitting the state to lend unused construction equipment to volunteers.

The total spending accounts for only about half of what Governor Josh Stein had asked for to meet the "immediate needs" in the mountains. The bill now goes to the full House next week.

[Read more by NC Newsline](#)

## PROPOSED LEGISLATION COULD RAISE WEEKLY UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENTS

North Carolina lawmakers are considering an increase in unemployment payments, proposing [House Bill 48](#) to raise the weekly cap from \$350 to \$450. The bill was approved by the House Finance Committee and follows a previous increase to \$600 weekly after Hurricane Helene, which expires on March 1.

Currently, the state offers 12 weeks of unemployment insurance at 50% of an individual's previous wages, but payments are capped at \$350. The bill won't affect those who have already applied for higher payments after Helene.

Additionally, counties in the mountains affected by Helene have received an extra 14 weeks of unemployment benefits paid by federal disaster funds.

The bill will now move to the House Rules Committee for further approval before going to the full House.

[Read more by NC Newsline](#)

## LEGISLATION WOULD CUT HEALTHCARE COSTS BY CURBING GOVERNMENT MANDATES

On Wednesday, the North Carolina Senate approved [Senate Bill 24](#) to reduce high healthcare costs by requiring that any new government health insurance mandate be balanced by repealing an existing one. This follows a Forbes study showing North Carolina has the highest healthcare costs in the U. S. Proponents say excessive mandates raise premiums, especially affecting small businesses.

"Every day, families across North Carolina are facing tough choices because of high healthcare costs," the bill's sponsors, Senators Jim Burgin (R-Harnett), Amy Galey (R-Alamance), and Benton Sawrey (R-Johnston), said in a joint statement. "It's incumbent on us to find ways to bring down those costs for families, and Senate Bill 24 is just that."

The measure passed with a vote of 30-15, with all Republicans in favor and three Democrats voting 'aye': Senator Dan Blue (D-Wake), Senator Paul Lowe (D-Forsyth) and Senator Gladys Robinson (D-Guilford).

The bill now goes to the House, requiring any new mandates to include ongoing funding for the State Health Plan or relevant state agencies.

[Read more by The Carolina Journal](#)

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## SMALL BUSINESS RETIREMENT SYSTEM LEGISLATION PROPOSED

Lawmakers in North Carolina have reintroduced a bill to create a "work-and-save" retirement program for small businesses. This public-private program would help employees save money through automatic payroll deductions, investing in traditional or Roth individual retirement accounts. The state will administer the program, but accounts can be set up with public and private financial institutions.

Sponsored by Representatives Jarrod Lowery (R-Robeson), Jeffrey McNeely (R-Iredell), and Harry Warren (R-Rowan), this is the second attempt to implement the program after the first did not pass in 2023. [House Bill 79](#) proposes the formation of the North Carolina Small Business Retirement Savings Board, consisting of 12 members appointed by various state officials. The bill was referred to the Appropriations Committee.

The default investment will be a Roth IRA with a starting contribution rate of 5%, allowing for annual increases. Employees can opt out or change their plans at any time. Eligible employers must be in the private sector and must not have offered a tax-favored retirement plan in the last two years.

[Read more by NC Newsline](#)

## WHAT WE'RE LISTENING TO

- [Under the Dome Podcast](#)
- [Do Politics Better Podcast](#)
- [WUNC Politics Podcast](#)
- [Carolina Newsmakers Podcast](#)
- [NC Capitol Wrap Podcast](#)

## WHAT WE'RE READING

- [Asheville Citizen Times](#)
- [Carolina Journal](#)
- [Charlotte Observer](#)
- [Fayetteville Observer](#)
- [Greensboro News & Record](#)
- [NC Insider](#)
- [New Bern Sun Journal](#)
- [News & Observer](#)
- [North State Journal](#)
- [Our State Magazine](#)
- [Triangle Business Journal](#)
- [Under the Dome](#)
- [Wilmington Star News](#)
- [Winston-Salem Journal](#)
- [WRAL](#)

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