NCCA Lobbyist Report

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The General Assembly ended the majority of their work for the short session on June 27, but have scheduled mini-sessions through December to consider limited items such as veto overrides and possible budget votes since legislators left Raleigh without agreeing on budget adjustments.

It was an exceptionally slow short session this year, with a much lower number of bills passed. In total, 29 bills were signed into law by Governor Cooper, he allowed one bill to become law without his signature, and three bills became law when the legislature overrode his veto. There are still five more bills that were vetoed by the governor that the legislature could possibly attempt to override in one of the upcoming mini-sessions.

Budget

Closed-door meetings on the budget had been ongoing since the start of the short session with optimism that adjustments for the second year of the biennial budget would be agreed upon and passed by the end of June. A main topic was how to spend some of the projected $1.4 billion surplus revenue. However, several weeks into discussions, that projected surplus amount was revised down to $987 million- a difference of $430 million that the legislature had assumed they would have while deciding how to spend the money. This change created a major road bump in the negotiations because the two chambers had differing opinions on how much of the surplus should be spent and how much should be saved. The Senate was firm in their stance that only a portion of the surplus should be spent, but claimed that the House wanted to spend the entire surplus, and more. Both sides refused to compromise in the end, and they decided to end the majority of their work without any budget adjustments. They said conversations will continue, leaving a small possibility for a compromise later in the year during one of the mini-sessions.

After budget talks broke down, leadership agreed to pass two stand-alone bills that would allocate $67.5 million in emergency funding for child care centers through the end of the year, and formally authorize pay raises for teachers and other school employees that had already been approved in the 2023 budget. Those bills were approved by the legislative and signed by the governor.

Medical Marijuana

The Senate attempted to move language to legalize medical marijuana again this year by adding the language to a House bill that would regulate CBD and hemp products, such as Delta 9. The bill, which had been passed by the House last year, moved through Senate committees and the Senate floor after the addition of the medical marijuana language, but came to a halt after being sent back to the House. Instead of taking a concurrence vote on the now-updated bill, it was sent to the House Rules Committee where it is expected to die.

Right to Try

A new issue that came up during short session was added to a gutted bill, then was approved by both chambers and was signed into law on July 8. HB98 allows eligible patients with life-threatening or severely debilitating illnesses the right to try individualized investigational drugs, biological products, or devices.

Mask Bill/Campaign Finance

HB237- Unmasking Mobs and Criminals Act emerged this year in an attempt to make it easier to prosecute people trying to hide behind a mask while committing a crime. It restricts mask-wearing during protests (unless it is being worn to prevent the spread of contagious disease), increases penalties for protests that impede traffic, and alters some campaign finance laws. The campaign finance portion was added at the last minute to the conference committee report and would allow corporate-funded federal Super PACs to donate to state political parties in NC. While legislative leadership said that it would simply level the playing field, citing changes during the 2020 elections that Republicans believe benefitted large Democratic donors, critics of the language are concerned the changes will reduce transparency by allowing contributions to be made to parties without fulfilling the current reporting requirements.

Governor Cooper vetoed the bill reasoning that “this legislation creates a gaping loophole for secret, unlimited campaign money,” but the legislature proceeded to override his veto.