



The General Assembly kicked off the 2021 session on Wednesday, January 13 with opening day speeches, organizing and the passing of rules. The legislative complex is open to the public, but social distancing is in effect. Masks are not required but were more common among legislators than in the spring. Last week's violence at the U.S. Capitol was on the minds of many and referenced in Sen. Berger and Speaker Moore's speeches.

House Speaker Tim Moore also announced committee chairs as part of the opening day festivities. Notable shifts include Rep. Dean Arp's (R-Union) promotion as a one of the House's senior appropriation chairs, along with Reps. Donny Lambeth (R-Forsyth) and Jason Saine (R-Lincoln). In addition, Rep. John Torbett (R-Gaston) is shifting away from his long-time transportation leadership roles to co-chair the Education K-12 Committee with Rep. Hugh Blackwell (R-Burke). Rep. Kristin Baker (R-Cabarrus) and Rep. Wayne Sasser (R-Cabarrus, Rowan, Stanly) joined Rep. Larry Potts (R-Davidson) and Rep. Donna White (R-Johnston) as House Health Chairs. Sen. Jim Perry (R-Lenoir, Wayne) and Sen. Jim Burgin (R-Harnett, Johnston, Lee) join Sen. Joyce Krawiec (R-Forsyth) as Senate Health chairs.

Legislators will take a two-week break, returning to start business on January 27th. Key dates on the legislative calendar include:

- March 11: Local bill filing deadline in the Senate
- March 25: Local bill filing deadline in the House
- April 6: Bill filing deadline in Senate for most bills
- April 20: House filing deadline for non-budget, non-finance bills
- April 27: House filing deadline for budget and finance-related bills
- May 13: Crossover deadline for bills to have passed either the House or Senate for consideration during the remainder of session

As they look forward to session, legislators noted that addressing the effects from COVID-19 will be a major focus, concentrating initially on federal relief funds passed at the end of last year. Lingering disagreements over Governor Cooper's use of emergency authority during the pandemic are likely to be another topic of discussion.

Legislative leaders have already stressed the importance of continuing supports for schools and to support student learning that has been impacted by COVID-19. Senator Berger has indicated his renewed commitment to changing the way North Carolina students learn to read. With a new State Superintendent of Public Instruction who appears committed to working with the State Board of Education, those efforts could gain traction. Speaker Moore and Senator Berger also gave a nod to the importance of early education and child care in a [recent article](#). A new bipartisan, bicameral early childhood legislative caucus could boost those efforts.

Medicaid transformation was also in the news again. Dave Richard, the state's deputy secretary for Medicaid, told legislators this week that NCDHHS is on schedule for the July 1 launch, saying "our commitment to you is that we're going to do everything possible." An online tool will launch January 25th that lists providers and the four pre-paid health plans (PHPs). Open enrollment will formally begin March 15th.

Finally, the election of Paul Newby as Chief Justice has sparked a number of changes at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Newby named Andrew Heath as the new director of the AOC and make numerous staff changes. Newby has also issued a new [order](#) allowing courts to reopen.