



PERKINSON LAW FIRM

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 02/04/2021

The General Assembly really got to work this week, with a heavy focus on education. Senate Bill 37 was introduced by Senators Ballard, Lee and Hise and would require school districts to offer all students daily in-person instruction or a mix of in-person and online classes. The bill would also give parents of special-education students the option of daily in-person instruction. While the bill has not passed the Senate yet, it has made quick progress and is on the calendar for final approval on February 9th.

Governor Cooper also focused on opening schools this week, joining with Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Catherine Truitt to strongly urge all schools to provide in-person instruction. While Cooper did not issue an executive order about reopening schools, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) did release [updated guidance](#) allowing all schools to open for in-person instruction with social distancing and other precautions.

Reflecting the General Assembly's promises to act quickly on COVID relief, Senate Bill 36, which would allocate about half of North Carolina's share of federal COVID relief funds passed in December, has already passed both the House and the Senate. The bill now moves to the Governor's desk for his signature. The bill includes:

- An additional \$1.6 billion in funding to K-12 schools
- An extension to allow families more time to apply for the \$335 Extra Credit Grants
- Nearly \$95 million for vaccine preparedness
- More than \$546 million in emergency rent relief and \$155 million for local governments with more than 200,000 people.
- \$39 million to expand rural broadband

Meanwhile, Governor Cooper has proposed his own plan for allocating federal COVID-19 relief funds and investing state resources to help North Carolina recover from the pandemic. His plans for allocating \$4 billion federal funding overlap in some areas with Senate Bill 36.

Cooper's plan includes:

- Approximately \$2 billion for emergency assistance for public and private K-12 schools and higher education institutions
- \$336 million for childcare and development block grants
- Approximately \$700 million for access to vaccines and testing, tracing and prevention measures
- \$546 million for emergency rental assistance
- \$258 million for Highway Infrastructure and \$65 million for airports.
- \$47 million for Community Mental Health Services.

- Funding for food assistance programs, such as SNAP and school nutrition

In addition to the federal allocation plan, Cooper is proposing using \$695 million from the state's General Fund to address other immediate needs. These state funds would be used for:

- \$50 million for continued hazard duty pay for state employees on the frontlines of COVID-19
- \$64.5 million for the replenishment of the North Carolina State Health Plan
- \$468 million for bonuses for educators and school personnel in public K-12 schools, community colleges and the university system
- \$30 million to extend high-speed internet and improve infrastructure and connectivity
- \$37 million to support small businesses
- Expansion of state unemployment benefits, increasing the maximum duration of benefits to 26 weeks and increasing the maximum benefit from \$350 to \$500 per week

Finally, a bill was introduced this week to change the lawful age for North Carolinians to marry to 18. North Carolina is one of just two states that allow children as young as 14 to marry with parental consent. Research has also shown that North Carolina may be one of the top 5 states in the nation for child marriage. Child marriage brings risks of exploitation, grooming and abuse.