



# North Carolina Spirits Association

Legislative Report  
June 23, 2023

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## Environmental Concerns Arise as Regulatory Reform Bill Advances

This week State lawmakers discussed House Bill 600, a regulatory reform bill, which received a favorable report and is progressing in the state Senate. The bill has raised concerns about its potential impact on the environment and conflicts with the Clean Water Act. One particular concern is the provision that would limit the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's authority to regulate chemical discharge into state waterways, including substances like PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), which are known as "forever chemicals" due to their persistence in the environment. Environmental advocates, including lawmakers and organizations like Cape Fear River Watch, have expressed opposition to the bill, arguing that it would weaken protections and violate the Clean Water Act. They are urging supporters to voice their opposition to lawmakers. Additionally, critics point out that another section of the bill could undermine DEQ's enforcement of federal and civil rights laws concerning large hog farms in eastern North Carolina, which have raised environmental and quality-of-life concerns for surrounding communities. Lawmakers are working to address concerns and ensure environmental safeguards are not compromised before the bill reaches a final vote. This bill is scheduled for consideration in the Senate Rules Committee on Monday.

## Proposed Constitutional Amendment in North Carolina Seeks to Limit State Government Spending

A proposed constitutional amendment in North Carolina aims to limit state government spending by tying it to a formula based on inflation and population growth. The bill, House Bill 146, received a hearing in the House Judiciary 1 Committee but was not voted on, and its prospects are uncertain. The constitutional amendment would require approval from voters in 2024 to be added to the state constitution. The General Assembly could surpass the spending limit, but only with a two-thirds vote in both chambers. Similar bills have been proposed before but failed to advance. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Dennis Riddell, emphasized that it differs from Colorado's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights and includes a provision allowing lawmakers to exceed the spending cap with a two-thirds vote. Committee Democrats expressed concerns that the bill would restrict future legislatures, while Rep. Riddell argued that it aims to protect taxpayers and bring discipline to the General Assembly. The bill would require approval by both chambers with three-fifths votes to be placed on the ballot next year.

## North Carolina's Elections Director Testifies on Voter Fraud, Funding, and Trust in Electoral Process

Karen Brinson Bell, the Executive Director of North Carolina's State Board of Elections, testified before the state legislature to discuss efforts to combat voter fraud, request funding, and address concerns about elections administration. The hearing, led by Republican Representative Jake Johnson, focused on elections integrity and improving public trust in the electoral process. Brinson Bell emphasized the need for funding to support future elections, including hiring more staff and implementing voter ID rules. She stated that voter fraud is a small problem, but the state works diligently to prevent it by cross-referencing voter rolls with various records. Brinson Bell urged lawmakers to combat false claims of voter fraud and protect election workers from threats. The hearing took place amid ongoing attempts by Republican legislators to change the composition and influence of the state elections board.

### **This Week at the General Assembly**

This week was initially expected to be the final week of committee meetings in the Senate. However, it appears that next week will be the last opportunity for bills to successfully navigate the Senate in the foreseeable future. Due to delays in budget negotiations, it seems that the legislative session will be longer than originally anticipated, with the budget expected to be completed towards the end of July.

While several non-controversial bills progressed through the General Assembly, the week was marked by the presence of some contentious bills in committee, including the Parent's Bill of Rights, which had been previously stalled in the House after gaining approval from the Senate earlier this year. Additionally, the Senate Republicans presented two election-related bills and there were amendments passed for the abortion bill, all while the Appropriation Chairs continued their work on the budget.

The House and Senate adjourned on Thursday and will reconvene on Monday June 26.

### **ABC Omnibus Bill**

The legislature's ABC omnibus bill is expected to be added to Senate Bill 527 which is in the House ABC Committee, and the bill is scheduled to be heard on Tuesday of this week.

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