

The 2021 long session finally came to an end in December after Governor Cooper and the General Assembly were able to agree on a state budget plan, and new voting maps were drawn following the most recent census. The session marked the longest annual session in history in terms of calendar days. COVID-19, a later tax-filing deadline, and redistricting all helped to push back adjournment.

### **Budget**

After many meetings and draft bills were exchanged between the governor and legislative leaders, the legislature was able to pass a budget bill that Governor Cooper was willing to sign. This was the first comprehensive budget bill that Cooper has signed during his term as governor, and the first budget the state has enacted since 2018 (which was enacted through a veto override). It included billions in COVID relief funds, individual and corporate income tax cuts, and raises and bonuses for teachers and state employees. Before signing the bill into law, Cooper criticized several parts of it, but said that the good outweighed the bad in the end.

### **Medicaid Expansion**

During the budget negotiation process, Senator Berger said that the Senate was open to expanding Medicaid, a top issue for Governor Cooper that contributed to the 2019 budget stalemate. However, Speaker Moore said they didn't have the votes for expansion in the House. While the budget didn't include Medicaid expansion, legislative leaders did include a provision that required the creation of an 18-member committee to study the issue. Members were recently announced for that newly-created committee, and they will be meeting throughout the interim.

### **Redistricting**

The General Assembly wrapped up the long session by drawing new voting maps for US House, NC House, and NC Senate following the most recent census. The new maps, which were drawn by Republicans who hold the majority in both legislative chambers, were immediately criticized by Democrats who claimed they were illegally gerrymandered. Three lawsuits were filed by different groups based on those claims. On the first day of the candidate filing period, a state Court of Appeals panel blocked filing for congressional and legislative candidates, thus preventing candidates from filing for office. Later that day, the full Court of Appeals reversed that decision and allowed the candidate filing period to reopen. Two days later, the NC Supreme Court halted the candidate filing period indefinitely and ruled that all state primary elections must be delayed two months in order to give the lawsuits time to make their way through the courts. They instructed that the originally scheduled March 8 primaries now be held on May 17. However, the General Assembly has indicated that they will vote to push the primaries back even farther to June 7 because they want to make sure there is enough time to redraw the maps should they have to. A three-judge Superior Court panel ruled in favor of legislative Republicans on June 11. That decision was quickly appealed, and the NC Supreme Court has scheduled arguments to begin on February 2.

The start date of the 2022 legislative short session has not been set yet. When they do come back, we expect HB683, which is to include the language on providing information on alternative care for pain, to move through the Senate. We will have more information about it closer to short session.