

New Child Safety Law Makes Drug Exposure A Felony

North Carolina General Statute 14-318.7, which took effect Dec. 1, makes it a felony for anyone to allow a child under 16 to be exposed to a controlled substance. The law establishes three levels of charges depending on the outcome of the exposure: a Class H felony for exposure alone; a Class E or Class D felony if the child is injured; and a Class B1 felony if the exposure results in the child's death.

Colby Jones published a piece on this exact subject last month in the Wake Forest Law Review. The title was *Balancing Protection for the Vulnerable with the Reality of 'Tough-on-Crime' Approaches*. Here was Jones' take on the new law:

In the year since the 2024 elections, one trend has become clear: "tough-on-crime" approaches are the current preference of both executive and legislative branches across the country. On July 9, 2025, North Carolina Governor Josh Stein signed Senate Bill 429, enacting wide-ranging crime legislation that increased punishments, created new criminal offenses, and made other revisions

to the criminal code. Notably, S.B. 429 created a new felony offense for exposing a child to a controlled substance. Under the new provision, a person is guilty of a Class H felony if the person "knowingly, intentionally,

or with reckless disregard for human life causes or permits a child to be exposed to a controlled substance." A child is defined as "[a]ny person who is less than 16 years of age." The provision includes additional felony

class enhancements if the exposure results in ingestion, serious injury, or death to the child.

Defining drug endangered children

According to the federal Drug

Endangered Children Task Force, a drug endangered child is "a person under the age of 18 who lives in or is exposed to an environment where drugs, . . . , are present." As a result of these environments, these children are subject to a heightened risk of or direct experiences of "physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; harm; or neglect." From 2015 to 2019, an estimated 21 million American children "lived with a parent who misused substances," and over 55,000 children in North Carolina lived with a "parent who had a substance use disorder." Further, other available North Carolina statistics indicate an alarming picture of drug exposures to children, like how "children have been found living in one out of every four homes where meth is made." Given the severe impacts of drug exposure on children, North Carolina's interest in and justification for protecting children from drug exposures through criminal enforcement are clear and admirable.

The State's child abuse framework already covers drug exposure.

S.B. 429 is not the State's first, or only, law that aims to protect this vulnerable population. Under the State's misdemeanor child abuse statute, courts have held that drug exposures amount to "creat[ing] or allow[ing] to be created a substantial risk of physical injury" to the child. As a result, drug exposures by parents and care providers can already be prosecuted as misdemeanor child abuse. If convicted, the parent or care provider is guilty of a class

A1 misdemeanor, the highest level of misdemeanor offense in North Carolina. The misdemeanor child abuse statute is an addition to other civil and criminal remedies, like the removal of the child from the home. Thus, the State's current child abuse framework creates a punishment for risky and life-threatening drug exposures while maintaining the process of removing the child to a safe environment. Additionally, North Carolina's felony child abuse statute provides that a parent or caregiver could be guilty of a felony for a "willful act or grossly negligent omission in the care of the child [which] shows a reckless disregard for human life." The felony classification is either Class E or Class G, depending on the severity of the injury to the child.

North Carolina risks ineffective overcriminalization with this provision.

Given this pre-existing framework, it begs the question of whether the new exposure provision is a stark overcriminalization of child drug exposures. For one, the new exposure provision provides that, "[t]he punishments set forth . . . apply unless the conduct is covered under some other provision of law providing greater punishment." This means that a parent or care provider could be potentially charged under both the new felony exposure statute and the pre-existing misdemeanor child abuse statute. Not only is this a significant change in the of-

(See **FELONY**, P. 2)



Stein, Jackson Push Back On Duke Energy's Proposed '27 Rate Increases

NC Newsline—Democratic Attorney General Jeff Jackson is intervening in Duke Energy's proposal to raise electricity rates in North Carolina.

Duke Energy's request, filed with the NC Utility Commission Nov. 20, asks for a 15% rate increase over the next two years. This would apply to Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress, the company's two utilities in the state.

"With costs rising everywhere, it's important we take a close look at Duke Energy's proposed rate increase to ensure it is necessary," Jackson said in a statement on Tuesday. "My office is intervening to make sure we find the right balance between investing in our energy infrastructure and protecting North

Carolinians' wallets."

Jackson's move is backed by Democratic Gov. Josh Stein, who held the role of attorney general prior to his election as the state's top executive.

In a statement released Tuesday afternoon, Stein described the proposed rate hike as "simply too high." He also criticized Duke Energy for cutting back on affordable clean energy.

"At a time when families are struggling to make ends meet, we should be doing everything we can to make life more affordable, not less," Stein said.

Duke Energy spokesperson Bill Norton told NC Newsline the company does not take requests to increase rates lightly.

He said the company is still await-

ing a scheduling order from the NCUK for public hearings across the state in 2026.

A decision on the request requires evaluation from the NCUK and the commission's public staff. Stakeholders like customer advocates and the attorney general are able to voice their concerns as well.

"We look forward to continuing a constructive dialogue with all parties as the review moves forward next year," Norton wrote in an email.

The rate hike would result in a revenue increase of \$1 billion for Duke Energy Carolinas each year, and \$729 million for Duke Energy Progress, according to the company. If approved, the increases would increase beginning in 2027.

Monthly electric bills for a typical

Duke Energy Carolinas residential customer using 1,000 kilowatt-hours per month would increase by \$17.22 each month in 2027 if approved, according to the utility. For the same metric, the rate would increase by \$23.11 each month for a typical Duke Energy Progress residential customer.

"Our goal is to deliver reliable power at the lowest possible cost for customers," Duke Energy's North Carolina president Kendal Bowman said in a statement announcing the proposed increases. "It's important to strike the right balance of prioritizing investments that enhance the energy grid for current and future needs while also maximizing cost-saving measures for our customers."

Bullet-Pocked Marker Memorializing 1918 Lynching On Display In Atlanta

ATLANTA (AP) — A historical marker from the site of a 1918 lynching that was repeatedly vandalized in recent years is now safely on display in Atlanta in an exhibit that opens Monday.

It memorializes an event that some people in rural southern Georgia have tried hard to erase: the killing of Mary Turner by a white mob that was bent on silencing her after she demanded justice for the lynching of her husband, Hayes Turner, and at least 10 other Black people.

Pocked with bullet holes and cracked at its pedestal by an off-road vehicle, the Georgia Historical Society marker reads in part: "Mary Turner, eight months pregnant, was burned, mutilated, and shot to death by a mob after publicly denouncing her husband's lynching the previous day. . . . No charges were ever brought



against known or suspected participants in these crimes. From 1880-1930, as many as 550 people were killed in Georgia in these illegal acts of mob violence."

Now each word damaged by bullets is projected on a wall, and visitors hear those words spoken by some of Turner's six generations of descendants.

"I'm glad the memorial was shot up," great-granddaughter Katrina Thomas said Saturday night after her first look at the exhibit in the National Museum for Civil and Human Rights. "Millions of people are going to learn her story. That her voice is continuing years and years after, it shows history does not disappear. It lives and continues to grow."

Americans learned about these

(See **MARKER** P. 2)

Man Wounded In 2nd Stabbing Attack On Charlotte Lightrail Since August

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Police in North Carolina have charged a 33-year-old man with critically injuring another person in a stabbing on a Charlotte commuter train, just a few months after a Ukrainian refugee riding one of the city's trains was killed in an unrelated knife attack.

Oscar Solarzano, 33, was charged with attempted first-degree murder, assault with a deadly weapon and other crimes stemming from the Friday afternoon attack in which he wielded a large knife, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police said in a news release.

Police said the victim suffered a stab wound and was hospitalized in critical but stable condition.

Solarzano was being held in jail Saturday without bond. A magistrate judge said in a court filing that the suspect was in the U.S. illegally and had previously been deported. He faced a hearing Monday morning in Mecklenburg County District Court.

An arrest warrant filed in a North



Carolina court says Solarzano appeared to be intoxicated and was slurring his words when he challenged the victim to a fight.

Online court and jail records did not list an attorney for Solarzano.

The attack comes less than four months after a 23-year-old woman from Ukraine was killed on a Char-

lotte commuter train in an apparently random assault captured on video. The victim, Iryna Zarutka, had been living in a bomb shelter in Ukraine before coming to the U.S. to escape the war, her relatives said.

A suspect, Decarlos Brown Jr., has been charged first-degree murder for Zarutka's killing in a North Carolina

state court, and was also indicted in federal court on a charge of causing death on a mass transportation system.

The death of the Ukrainian woman sparked anger among allies of President Donald Trump and figures in his Make America Great Again movement. Many pointed to the case as evidence that federal intervention was needed because leaders of large cities and state governors are failing to protect their residents from crime and rampant illegal immigration.

In November, the Trump administration increased immigration enforcement in Charlotte. City officials said the surge in enforcement caused "unnecessary fear and uncertainty."

Trump commented Saturday about the latest stabbing on his Truth Social site. "Another stabbing by an Illegal Migrant in Charlotte, North Carolina. What's going on in Charlotte? Democrats are destroying it, like everything else, piece by piece!!! President DJT"

Duke Beats No. 16 Virginia 27-20 In Overtime For First Outright ACC Championship Since 1962



CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Duke has its first outright Atlantic Coast Conference football championship since 1962.

Now it wants a little more. Blue Devils coach Manny Diaz wasted little time Saturday night advocating for his team to make the 12-team College Football Playoff after Duke beat No. 16 Virginia 27-20 in overtime on Saturday night.

"The ACC champion should go to the College Football Playoff this year and every year," Diaz said.

Duke threw the CFP selection process into chaos when Darian Mensah connected with Jeremiah Hasley for a 1-yard touchdown on a fourth-down play in overtime and Luke Mergott sealed the game with an interception.

But winning the first overtime game in ACC championship history isn't expected to be enough to get Duke and its 8-5 record into the CFP. The Blue Devils' victory opens the door for a second Group of Five team — likely James Madison — to make it.

Diaz doesn't get it. He pointed out Duke's superior strength of schedule, with seven wins over power-conference teams — all ACC foes — while James Madison lost to its only Power Four opponent, Louisville.

"You can't compare going through the Sun Belt this year — it has been a really good conference in years past — but most of their top teams are just having down years," Diaz said. "So they (James Madison) probably are not challenged they way the would going through a normal Sun Belt season."

Duke last won a share of the ACC regular-season title in 1989, sharing it with Virginia in Steve Spurrier's final season as the Blue Devils' coach. The conference championship game was created in 2005, and Duke got there this year by winning a five-way tiebreaker.

Virginia (10-3), the ACC regular-season champion, would have reached the CFP for the first time in school history with a victory but fell short when Chandler Morris was intercepted by Mergott on the Cavaliers' first offensive play of OT.

Coach Tony Elliott described his team as having "the heart of a champion."

WEATHER FORECAST



Black Families Pay More To Keep Their Houses Warm

The Conversation—Rising energy costs consume a bigger and bigger chunk of family budgets in the United States. Our research has found that for many African American families, those costs take an extra big bite out of their incomes. This bite, the percentage of a household's income used to pay energy bills, is called a household's "energy burden."

Households with high energy burdens struggle to adapt to rising prices. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that more than 12 million households keep their homes either colder or hotter than is actually comfortable, specifically in an effort to keep control of energy costs. And 24 million households report having had to forgo food or medicine at least once in the past year to pay utility bills.

Also, studies indicate that people facing high energy burdens often turn to unsafe heating sources, such as space heaters, stoves or fireplaces, and are at higher risk of asthma, depression, premature mortality and poor self-reported health. Our recent study of 2019 data found that those

burdens are not spread evenly across the country or across society.

Specifically, families living in majority-Black census tracts spent 5.1% of their income on energy — significantly higher than the 3.2% share spent by average American households. Census tracts dominated by other racial groups in our study — whites, Latinos and Asian Americans — were much closer to the overall average.

Energy injustice

Often, disparities like this are attributed to income, which is indeed a factor given that Black households have a median income of \$53,444, while the overall median in the U.S. is \$78,538. However, our study found that even when a majority-white and a majority-Black census tract had the same median household income, the average share of household income spent on energy was higher in the majority-Black census tract.

We found two possible reasons for this difference, both rooted in race and housing situations.

First, our analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data finds that African Amer-



ican-majority census tracts have older homes on average than other census tracts. Older homes often have lower energy efficiency due to less insulation, single-pane windows, and gaps and cracks in the building's structure, especially around windows, doors and chimneys. So even if a Black family earns the same income as another family, the Black

family might live in an older house, requiring them to use more energy to warm or cool their homes, cook food, heat water and so on.

Also, we found that Black families are more likely to live in rental properties, where they cannot easily make energy-efficiency upgrades — such as installing new windows, insulation or appliances. At the same

time, most landlords do not have an incentive to spend money to improve building efficiency because tenants usually pay utility bills. In the United States, 9 in 10 rental households pay for all or some of their energy bills and therefore face this split-incentive problem.

Many of these challenges can be attributed to the structural racism inherent in redlining. This early 20th century practice made it harder for prospective homeowners to get mortgages to buy homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Black people, immigrants or other minorities. That left more of the homes in those communities owned by landlords and occupied by tenants.

Even though redlining was banned in 1968, it left a legacy of underinvestment in properties, decreased property values and worse health outcomes.

Intersecting inequities

Other factors also likely intersect to impose a higher energy burden on Black families. Many of these were beyond the scope of our study but are well documented. For example,

energy support programs are notoriously underfunded and often hard to access, especially for families without the time or connections to know about them or understand application requirements.

These are just some possible factors that increase the energy burden for Black families. The main lesson for policymakers is that communities are complicated. Energy efficiency upgrade programs that also seek to alleviate high energy burdens cannot be one-size-fits-all. A program for middle-class families in one neighborhood may not work in another community with older housing stock or large numbers of rental units.

To be successful, local officials designing programs that are aimed at families' energy burdens will have to learn about the different challenges facing each distinct community — whether it's leaky older homes, outdated water heaters, low incomes or rental split incentives. Reducing energy burdens for Black families will take more than technical fixes; it will take policies based in community engagement to build a deeper understanding of place.

'You Remember The Ones You Couldn't Help': Doctors Reflect On Burnout And The Emotional Cost Of Care

By Ellie Kollme

UNC Media Hub

Dr. Amir Barzin, a family medicine physician and the chief operating officer at UNC Health, starts each morning with a solitary run to clear his mind before the day begins. The routine, he said, helps him manage the daily pressures of working in health care — pressures that many physicians across the country face.

His approach reflects a growing awareness among medical professionals of the mental and emotional toll their work can take, which can contribute to widespread issues such as burnout and depression.

This year's annual Wellbeing Survey conducted by the Physicians Foundation and sent to more than 1,000 U.S. physicians, found that of the physicians who answered the online survey, 55 percent reported having felt "levels of debilitating stress." Fifty-four percent of respondents reported experiencing burnout, which is associated with poor mental and physical health.

The effects of burnout can also have direct consequences for patient care and health care outcomes.

"You can make errors in finance and what happens is people lose their money," said Dr. Theodore Stamatakos, a urologist based in

Charlotte who has been practicing for 31 years. "But when you make errors — and I'm talking about major errors — in medicine, people lose their lives or people suffer."

"They get grumpier, they get snappy" The research database maintained by the National Library of Medicine contains more than 36,000 articles published in the past five years examining the phenomenon of health care worker burnout.

The definitions of burnout in the studies vary somewhat, but in general it's a work-related stress syndrome resulting from chronic exposure to job stress.

The National Institute for Health Care Management identifies three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, which can lead to irritability; cynicism, which replaces empathy with negativity and emotional numbness; and a low level of professional effectiveness.

James Romanowski, a Charlotte orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine, said he has seen these symptoms appear in colleagues through gradual changes in physicians' attitudes.

"They get grumpier, they get snappy, they're less connected, they're less engaged," Romanowski said. "The signs aren't obvious, but they're there."

Similarly, Robert Seymour, an anesthesiologist in Raleigh, said physicians can become callous and lose empathy for their patients.

"It is unfortunate because a lot of times, these people are the ones that have a whole lot to give and are very



talented and skilled physicians," Seymour said.

Many physicians experience moral injury, the top cause of physician burnout, according to NIHCM. That's what happens when someone knows the right course of action but is unable to carry it out, or when they witness events that contradict their moral beliefs or expectations. Health care policies that limit care for certain patients, insurance limitations and increasing costs can create situations where doctors find it difficult to do what's best for patients — and for themselves.

The experience can lead to guilt, shame, a sense of betrayal, sadness and a loss of confidence. Physicians report that too many bureaucratic tasks, long hours and lack of respect

from other staff contribute to their moral injury and burnout, the NIHCM found.

Increasing administrative challenges take a toll

Sindhuja Damodaran, a UNC Chapel Hill senior from Charlotte, shadowed doctors around the Triangle this summer to gain insight into the roles physicians play in health care. An environmental health science major at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, Damodaran hopes to go to medical school after graduation.

One of her biggest takeaways from the summer was that despite doctors' best efforts, they cannot always achieve their goals.

"All these people work really hard and try very hard," she said. "This is

basically their entire life, and sometimes it just doesn't work. And I think that can be very disheartening."

Romanowski said that his subspecialist role as an orthopaedic surgeon often means he's the final stop in someone's care journey, which is difficult when there's nothing more he can do. He said the patients he could not help weigh on him.

"You don't remember all the people you helped; you remember the ones that you couldn't help," Romanowski said.

Many physicians point to increasing administrative challenges as another major driver of burnout. A 2024 study by Google Cloud and The Harris Poll showed that administrative work, like acquiring prior authorization for treatment, decreases job satisfaction and impacts patient care. The study found that administrative work contributes to feelings of burnout for 82 percent of clinicians and 81 percent of medical staff.

Romanowski said medical school did not teach him much about the administrative or financial aspects of medicine, which he encountered only after entering the workforce. Barzin agreed, adding that few doctors pursue the profession for those parts of the job.

"If you're thinking about what allures you to medicine, no one ever says, 'I'm really excited about going to work and arguing with insurance companies about a prior authorization,'" Barzin said. "What excites them and gets them really happy about going to work is providing care for the patients."

MARKER

Continued from page 1

lynchings in 1918 because they were investigated in the immediate aftermath by Walter White, who founded the Georgia chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and would become an influential voice for civil rights nationwide. A light-skinned Black man who could pass for white, he interviewed eyewitnesses and provided names of suspects to the governor of Georgia, according to his report in the NAACP's publication, *The Crisis*.

Georgia was among the most active states for lynchings, according to the Equal Justice Initiative's catalog of more than 4,400 documented racial terror lynchings in the U.S. between Reconstruction and World War II. The organization has placed markers at many sites and built a monument to the victims in Montgomery, Alabama.

The nation's first anti-lynching legislation was introduced in 1918 amid national reaction to deaths of Mary and Hayes Turner and their neighbors in Georgia's Brooks and Lowndes counties. It passed the House in 1922, but Southern senators filibustered it and another century would pass before lynching was made a federal hate crime in 2022.

"The same injustice that took her life was the same injustice that kept vandalizing it, year after year," said Randy McClain, the Turners' great-grandnephew. He grew up in the same rural area where the lynchings happened but did not know much about them or discover his family connection until he was an adult.

"Here it feels like a very safe space," McClain said. "She's now finally at rest, and her story can be told. And her family can feel some sense of vindication."

Drug Exposure A Felony—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

fense classification and punishment, but it also does little to materially change the protections in place for children. Rather, when considering that the statute does not apply only if a greater punishment already applies, it seems clear that the focus is simply on punishing the offender. Similarly, circumstances may allow for a defendant to be charged under both the felony child abuse statute and the new felony exposure provision. If convicted, these two felony charges may have other punishment and sentencing ramifications.

One could reason that the new felony exposure statute will serve as an effective deterrent; however, there is "a large body of prior research that cast doubt on the theory that stiffer prison terms deter drug misuse, distribution, and other drug-

law violations." Given the important interest in preventing children from drug exposure, there must certainly be other alternatives for the State to explore rather than potentially ineffective enhanced criminalization.

Additionally, the statute, as currently drafted, is vague with respect to two central issues related to application and prosecution. First, the statute provides no definition of "exposure." In the first criminal prosecutions under this statute, North Carolina courts will need to define this key term. For instance, some sources have proposed that under the common definition of exposure, mere possession of the controlled substance in the presence of a child is not enough, but that the child will need to "encounter the controlled substance in some way." However,

until courts clarify the legislature's intent, the statute could be interpreted to have a broad definition of exposure, further increasing the number of prosecutions that could be brought under this new statute.

Second, the statute applies to "a person" who exposes a child to a controlled substance. This unlimited language presents serious concerns regarding the statute's application. For instance, one source raises the following, not unlikely, hypothetical of "a group of 15-year-old teenagers [who] smoke marijuana together." Under North Carolina state law and the statute, marijuana is a controlled substance. Under the new law, are each of the teenagers potentially guilty of felony exposure of a controlled substance to a child? The plain language of the statute seems

to indicate yes. And if so, it raises the more important public policy question of whether criminal prosecution of these teenagers is the best societal outcome, given the risks and impacts the criminal justice system has on child defendants.

For now, the impacts of the new felony exposure statute are unknown. However, the legislation took effect on December 1, 2025, meaning the first prosecutions under the provision are quickly forthcoming. Some North Carolina advocacy groups have already praised the provision as "progress"; however, it remains to be seen whether the provision will merely result in increased punishment and overcriminalization or if it will lead to a material decrease in the number of children exposed to controlled substances in North Carolina.

U.S. Federal Tax Refunds Are Expected To Rise By About \$1,000 Next Year

By Stacy M. Brown

Black Press USA

Federal tax refunds are positioned for a sharp rise next year, with new projections showing that the average payment could increase by about \$1,000 for millions of Americans.

Analysts expect the typical refund to reach roughly \$4,151 for the 2026 filing season, a major jump from the \$3,151 average refund taxpayers received during the 2025 season. CBS News reported that IRS filing data has revealed that the average direct deposit refund for 2025 stands at \$3,151, up from \$3,092 the prior year.

"When people go to file, they'll be surprised by really, really large refunds," Don Schneider, deputy head of U.S. policy at Piper Sandler and one of the report's authors, said in a recent podcast about the analysis. "In a typical year, we might have about \$270 billion in tax refunds, and it'll be that plus another \$90 billion."



Analysts expected a spike to come after the Trump administration's sweeping tax and spending law was signed in July. The law eliminates federal taxes on some overtime and tipped income and lifts the state and local tax deduction cap from \$10,000 to \$40,000. All changes were made retroactive to 2025, setting up larger refunds when taxpayers file in early 2026.

Because most Americans receive their refunds within about 21 days of filing, the size of those payments often carries significant weight in household budgets. Next year could bring one of the biggest refund seasons on record.

The benefits will not be evenly shared. Piper Sandler's analysis shows middle and upper-middle income households, those earning

between \$60,000 and \$400,000, stand to gain the most. That finding matches a Tax Policy Center review that estimated that people earning more than \$217,000 receive six of every ten dollars in new tax breaks created by the July law.

High earners will see some limits. The expanded \$40,000 SALT deduction begins to phase out for households earning more than \$500,000. Lower-income filers are also unlikely to benefit because the higher SALT cap only helps people whose state and local tax bills exceed the standard deduction. Filers must itemize to claim it, which tax experts note is less common among lower-income households.

Schneider said the impact falls primarily on households in the middle of the income distribution rather than those at the lowest or highest ends.

"This isn't going to the very bottom of the distribution. It isn't going to the very top of the distribution either," Schneider said.

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Business & Finance

NC Will Launch Helene Housing Programs For Multi-Family, Workforce Units & The Chance To Build Them

NC Newswire—North Carolina's programs to repair and rebuild multi-family and workforce housing in western counties will begin accepting applications in early 2026, Gov. Josh Stein said this week.

"Multi-family housing applications will be in the first part of the year," Stein told reporters Wednesday. "And workforce [housing] will follow."

The housing initiatives are part of a larger, federally-funded effort to rebuild housing after Hurricane Helene in fall 2024. State officials have been accepting applications for single-family housing since June; that program's applications close Dec. 31.

That single-family program uses the largest chunk of \$1.4 billion in federal grant money, just over \$800 million. The multi-family program will spend around \$191 million, according to the state's federally-approved plan, and the workforce program will spend around \$53 million.

The state's decision to stagger the timing of the programs is due to "limited staff," Stein said Wednesday, as state officials and contractors



have pushed to get as many people enrolled in the single-family program as possible. State officials had initially estimated that the multi-family and workforce programs would open in late 2025.

As of Dec. 4, there are just under 5,000 active applications for single-family housing, according to state data.

Multi-family housing repairs and rebuilds will focus on rentals that are separated into two categories: small projects with four or fewer units, and large projects with five or more units. Those projects can include those that are mixed-use, and large project applicants can include both for-profit developers, nonprofits and local governments.

Small projects will receive anywhere from \$250,000 to \$1.5 million, according to the state plan. Large projects can receive up to \$15 million.

If projects under the program have received or could receive low-income housing tax credits, state officials will consult with the North Carolina

Housing Finance Agency. The state plan calls for priority to be given to projects developed in areas with "high costs ... relative to area median gross income" and higher rates of poverty.

The N.C. Department of Commerce, which is overseeing the housing programs, expects multiple rounds of applications "over the next several years" for large multi-family projects, the plan says.

Workforce housing, meanwhile, will likely have just one application round.

The program aims "to incentivize (workers) to remain in western NC following Helene and to partially remedy inadequate housing production in past years across western NC," according to the state plan.

Housing developed under the workforce program will be for ownership, available to households who make up to 80% of an area's median income. Local governments, public and private companies and nonprofits are all eligible to apply to develop projects under the program.

Passing On A Family Business Isn't Easy And Here's Why

Earlier this year, the world watched with interest as the Murdoch family's real-life Succession drama came to a close.

Media mogul Rupert Murdoch's children — eyeing an empire estimated to be worth more than US\$20 billion (A\$30 billion) and control of the Fox Corporation and News Corporation — had disputed a change to their trust that would put control squarely in the hands of only one of his heirs, Lachlan.

A settlement was reached in September, giving Lachlan control and paying three of his siblings to exit.

But the very public and bitter battle was a classic example of the factors at play in succession planning for any family business. In addition to the business implications, it's often fraught with emotion and power struggles.

For a country such as Australia, which is heavily reliant on family firms, these tensions matter far beyond the headlines. Understanding why succession is difficult — and how to get it right — is essential.

Powerhouse of the economy
Family-owned businesses are a crucial part of Australia's economy. Small and medium-sized firms account for about 99% of all businesses, with about 70% being family-owned.

Surviving over time can be challenging. The "30-13-3" statistic (30% of firms transition to the second generation, 13% to the third, and 3% beyond that) is well known, despite some researchers now calling it into question.

Global evidence indicates only a minority of family firms successfully transition across multiple generations.

Emotional ties
A major part of what sets family businesses apart from other types of firms relates to what I and other family business scholars call "socioemotional wealth".

This describes the emotional value families place on their business: legacy, identity, reputation, continuity and the comfort of keeping decision-making "in the family".

These emotional bonds can be a source of strength. Research has shown family firms can be remarkably steady during moments of upheaval, including mergers and acquisitions and periods of financial distress because they prioritise long-term stability and trust.

But they also explain why successions can become so fraught. When leadership transitions threaten a family's legacy, identity or long-standing traditions, emotions intensify.

Parents and earlier generations can feel they're not just losing a role, they're also losing a part of themselves. They may also make strategic decisions driven only by emotions, leading to conflicts, financial disruption and potential failure.

Openness to change
A recent study of mine adds another important layer, suggesting families adopt one of two mindsets.

One sees reality as relatively fixed, with families cautious of risks that might destabilise their legacy. The other views the business as flexible and adaptable.

These contrasting mindsets may help explain why some successions unfold smoothly — and others erupt into conflict. Families with the latter mindset tend to be more willing to let the next generation reshape the business.

The next generation
Australia is heading for a A\$3.5 trillion generational wealth transfer, one of the biggest shifts of assets in its history. This will include many family businesses.

At the same time, digital transformation is reshaping every industry — from agriculture to construction to retail.

Younger successors tend to be digital natives. They often arrive fluent in data analytics, automation and

artificial intelligence (AI). Many grew up in environments where constant change was the norm, meaning they naturally lean towards adaptability and flexibility.

Older leaders, particularly founders, often lean the other way. Deeply connected to the business they built, they are shaped by decades of experience and success.

The same socioemotional wealth that sustained the firm can make them reluctant to hand over control or adopt untested digital tools.

Soon-to-be-published research of mine with Nidhida Lin at Macquarie University Innovation, Strategy and Entrepreneurship (ISE) Research Centre has explored the way in Australian family firms, founder influence and long periods of stability often reinforce a mindset that favours tradition and caution. In contrast, family control and a strong desire for dynastic succession, together with the involvement of later generations, tend to encourage change and the adoption of AI technologies.

That tension, between preserving the legacy and the desire to reinvent it, is now one of the biggest challenges Australian family firms face in ensuring "the show goes on".

Getting it right
Succession planning is not just a

financial or legal process. Families need to acknowledge the emotions and feelings involved, including love, fear, grief, pride and ambition.

Avoiding these conversations only increases the risk of misunderstanding and resentment.

Other important steps for success include:

- creating a governance structure — a clear set of rules and roles that guide how the family and the business make decisions
- empowering the next generation to lead the digital transformation, and
- testing the succession plan before a crisis.

Preparing early

The good news is businesses can prepare for this change well in advance. A good example of succession planning comes from family-owned Australian office supplies company, COS. COS has an annual revenue of A\$300 million and more than 600 employees, as well as warehouses in every state.

Getting succession right is not just about choosing the next leader. It is about understanding the emotional foundations of the family, recognising the mindsets driving decisions and creating a path that makes room for the future.

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Michael Jordan Testifies At NASCAR Trial

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Michael Jordan has had a lifetime of big moments. His latest came on the witness stand in a federal courtroom.

The retired NBA great testified Friday against NASCAR in an anti-trust case he is pursuing against the stock car series on behalf of his race team, 23XI, along with Front Row Motorsports. Both want to force NASCAR to change the way it does business with its teams, accusing it of monopolistic behavior.

"Someone had to step forward and challenge the entity," the soft-spoken Jordan told the jury. "I felt I could challenge NASCAR as a whole."

It was a different role for the 62-year-old Jordan, known best for the six NBA titles he won with the Chicago Bulls and his business interests in retirement, including his still relatively new role as a NASCAR team co-owner with three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin. 23XI is a combination of Jordan's longtime jersey number and Hamlin's race car number.

Dressed in a dark blue suit, Jordan slowly headed to the stand for the afternoon session, adjusted the seat for his 6-foot-6 frame and settled in. Those in the packed courtroom hung on every word.

Jordan said he grew up a NASCAR fan, attending races at 11 or 12 with his family at tracks in Charlotte and Rockingham in his home state but also at Darlington in South Carolina and the Talladega superspeedway in



Alabama. "We called it a weekend vacation," he said.

There were moments of levity on a dramatic day of testimony that also included Heather Gibbs, the daughter-in-law of team owner and NFL Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs. People were turned away from the courtroom and U.S. District Judge Kenneth Bell couldn't help but notice the high attendance in front of him as well as an overflow room nearby.

"I take it Mr. Jordan is the next witness," Bell quipped.

Outside the courthouse in downtown Charlotte, a crowd gathered for the first time this week for a chance to see Jordan. One woman screamed "Oh My God, Mike! You are an icon,

you the best, you the best to do it in the NBA!" Another claimed to have played golf and cards with Jordan acquaintances while asking Jordan to pose for a photo with his daughters.

Jordan said, "Man, it's cold out here for you guys," before complimenting the two girls on their Nike-branded hoodies.

A spectator held a sign that read "NASCAR Your Fans Deserve Better" and Hamlin turned to him and said "You're right" as they tried to make their way through the throng to a caravan of waiting SUVs.

On the witness stand, Jordan noted he was an early fan of Richard Petty, like his dad. He later gravitated to Cale Yarborough, "the origi-

nal No. 11. Sorry, Denny," Jordan testified as Hamlin watched from the gallery.

Jordan was asked to outline his career, noting his time with the Bulls and adding he remains a minority owner of the Charlotte Hornets. Did he play anywhere else?

"I try to forget it but I did," said Jordan, who played for the Washington Wizards in a mostly forgettable return to the NBA after his championship runs with the Bulls and a brief time playing minor league baseball.

But Jordan spent most of his time making clear why he was in court suing the series he loves over the charters that guarantee teams revenue and access to Cup Series races. Among other things, the plaintiffs want the charters made permanent, which NASCAR has balked at.

"Look, we saw the economics wasn't really beneficial to the teams," Jordan testified, adding: "The thing I see in NASCAR that I think is absent is a shared responsibility of growth as well as loss."

As the session wound down, defense attorney Lawrence Buterman noted the novelty of cross-examining an icon like Jordan, closing with the comment: "Thank you for making my 9-year-old think I'm cool today."

"You're not wearing any Jordans today," Jordan replied. When he was dismissed from the stand, he said "whew" and made his way back to the seat in the front row he's occupied with.



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