



Foreclosure Filings Accelerate In 2026

Housingwire—Foreclosure activity accelerated in the first quarter of 2026, with signs of mounting operational pressure for mortgage servicers and downstream vendors, according to ATTOM's latest U.S. Foreclosure Market Report and insights from industry executives.

While overall foreclosure volumes remain below pre-Great Recession peaks, starts, completions and real estate-owned (REO) inventories are climbing, timelines are shrinking and geographic hot spots — especially in parts of the Sun Belt — are emerging.

The rise is less of a surprise and more a delayed reckoning after several years of aggressive loss mitigation and forbearance programs, executives said.

ATTOM reported that 118,727 properties had a foreclosure filing in Q1 2026, up 6% from the prior quarter and 26% year over year. March alone saw 45,921 properties with filings, 18% higher than February and 28% above March 2025.

Foreclosure starts — an early warning indicator — rose to 82,631 properties in the first quarter, up 7% from Q4 2025 and 20% from a year earlier. Bank repossessions (REOs)



climbed even faster, with lenders taking back 14,020 properties in Q1, a 45% annual increase.

"While volumes remain below historical peaks, the continued rise, especially in starts and bank repossessions, suggests financial pressure may be building for some homeowners and could signal shifting housing market dynamics," Rob Barber, CEO at ATTOM, said in a statement.

According to Donna Schmidt, president and CEO of DLS Servicing, the industry saw five years of very low foreclosure rates due to

loss-mitigation policies that allowed borrowers to "kick the can down the road."

"The restructuring of loss mitigation that has reduced the number of options offered has revealed this weakness," Schmidt said. "I expected to see five years of normal foreclosure activity get condensed and forced through the system in the next two years. This is just the start."

For servicers, the compressed window of elevated foreclosure activity raises questions about staffing, vendor capacity and compliance controls

that were built in a different interest rate and delinquency environment. The operational impact extends well beyond the teams managing legal actions and REO disposition.

"When foreclosures start to rise year over year, servicers feel it first as pipeline pressure," Mirza Hodzic, managing director and founder of BlackWolf Advisory Group, said in a statement. "The work is not limited to the foreclosure department. It stretches loss mitigation transitions, borrower communications, document processing, and oversight of attorneys and vendors. If capacity and controls do not scale with volume, timelines and borrower experience suffer."

According to Hodzic, the jump in bank repossessions is a signal that the back end of the process is getting busier too, putting real demand on REO and property related functions like inspections, preservation, title and curative services, and vendor management.

ATTOM found that properties foreclosed in Q1 2026 spent an average of 577 days in the process, down 3% from the prior quarter and 14% year over year. It marked the sixth straight quarter of declining timelines.

NC Lawmakers Pass Medicaid Funding

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

North Carolina lawmakers have approved a sweeping Medicaid funding measure that will keep the state's program operating through the end of the fiscal year while introducing a series of new eligibility requirements and oversight provisions.

House Bill 696, which passed in both chambers, allocates \$319 million from state reserve funds to address a budget shortfall in the Medicaid program. The measure now heads to Gov. Josh Stein.

The federally subsidized program currently provides health coverage to more than 3.1 million North Carolinians—over a quarter of the state's population—including low-income families, children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

The \$319 million infusion matches the shortfall projected by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, driven by higher-than-expected enrollment and rising health care costs. Lawmakers said the funding is necessary to ensure uninterrupted coverage through June.



North Carolina expanded Medicaid in 2023 under the Affordable Care Act, adding more than 720,000 new enrollees as of March 2026. However, uncertainty remains at the federal level following a broader spending plan that would cut Medicaid funding nationwide over the next decade, potentially increasing the financial burden on states.

In addition to funding, the legislation introduces significant policy changes aimed at tightening eligibility and reducing costs.

Medicaid eligibility will be reviewed monthly instead of quarterly, requiring more frequent verification of income, household size, and work status; Beneficiaries will face stricter documentation requirements, limiting the use of self-reported information; Work requirements and six-month eligibility redeterminations will be implemented for certain expansion recipients.

The bill also includes measures to verify citizenship status and prevent ineligible individuals from receiving

benefits.

Republican lawmakers, who hold majorities in both chambers, said the changes are necessary to control costs and ensure the program's long-term sustainability.

"We cannot continue to throw dollars at a program without making changes to protect taxpayers," said Sen. Benton Sawrey, a Republican and chair of the Senate Health Care Committee.

House Speaker Destin Hall echoed that sentiment, arguing the bill introduces "common-sense guardrails" to improve efficiency and accountability.

Some Democrats raised concerns that the new requirements could create barriers for eligible recipients.

House Minority Leader Robert Reives warned that increased paperwork and more frequent eligibility checks could discourage participation and lead to coverage losses.

"The harder we make it for people... the more chances they're going to not do it," Reives said, suggesting that administrative burdens could result in eligible individuals losing access to care.

Sen. Michael Garrett was the lone vote against the bill in the Senate.



NEW BILL SEEKS FINANCIAL PENALTIES FOR SCHOOLS THAT VIOLATE THE 'PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS'

WUNC - The majority leader of the North Carolina House has filed a bill to withhold state funding from school districts or charter schools that violate the previously passed "Parents' Bill of Rights." That law bars public schools from teaching about gender identity, sexuality or sexual orientation or from keeping school materials about those subjects.

Representative Brenden Jones (R-Robeson) announced he was filing the new bill at the end of a hearing where lawmakers pressed Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) administrators about books in their elementary school libraries.

CHCCS Superintendent Rodney Trice acknowledged that a list of books in question are in school libraries but said they aren't used for direct instruction. They included titles such as "Heather Has Two Mommies" and "Jacob's New Dress."

Republican lawmakers on the House Oversight Committee argued library books are covered under the law as supplementary materials, although the law does not explicitly mention library books.

Jones said under the bill, districts would face real consequences for violations of the Parents' Bill of Rights, like the loss of central office funding.

"When a district chooses not to follow the law, it should not expect to continue receiving taxpayer dollars without accountability," Jones said.

The bill is officially named the "Curriculum, Honesty, Compliance and Child Safety Act" and Jones made clear that acronym is also a reference to Chapel Hill - Carrboro City Schools.

"For everyone to remember why we have it today, it will be called the CHCCS Act," Jones said.

NORTH CAROLINA EXPANDS LEAD PROGRAMS ACROSS NUMEROUS COUNTIES

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

A quarter century in law enforcement led one Fayetteville officer to a conclusion that is now shaping policy across North Carolina: arresting people struggling with addiction was not solving the problem.

For 25 years, Lars Paul worked in narcotics enforcement with the Fayetteville Police Department, making drug arrests, responding to overdoses and leading high-risk operations. Over time, he said, the pattern became clear: many individuals cycled repeatedly through jail without meaningful change in the underlying issues driving their arrests.

"I got to see firsthand over all those years that, 'Hey, we're not winning this,'" Paul said. "We're doing the same thing over and over again, and things aren't changing."

That experience helped drive the creation of a different approach. In 2016, the Fayetteville Police Department launched the state's first Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program, commonly known as LEAD. The initiative allows officers to redirect people accused of low-level, nonviolent offenses—often tied to substance use—away from arrest and into treatment and support services.

The model, first developed in Seattle, connects participants with case managers who help them access housing, substance use treatment, transportation and other resources. Instead of focusing on punishment, the program emphasizes stabilization and long-term recovery.

"For many years, the only tool we had was to arrest," said Fayetteville Police Chief Roberto Bryan Jr. "Today, because of LEAD, our officers have a bridge and a tool that addresses the root causes behind the calls for services that we respond to."

Elizabeth City Seeks Healing Five Years After Andrew Brown Jr.'s Death

WUNC - Five years ago, 42-year-old Andrew Brown, Jr. died in his car a few yards away from his home in Elizabeth City, with a deputy sheriff's bullet in the back of his head.

Brown Jr.'s death in 2021 made international headlines as a national reckoning of racism and police brutality arrived at a small town along the northeastern edge of the state.

On the fifth anniversary of his death with the attention of the national press long gone, several people interviewed by WUNC News say that the persistent hope for healing and accountability still remains.

"He was executed," said D.J. Bryant, manager of local barbershop Legends Barber Lounge. "It could happen to any one of us at any given time, especially of our persuasion."

Legends Barber Lounge is known and frequented by many in this majority-Black city of nearly 20,000 people, including members of law enforcement and those who knew Brown.

The city hasn't been the same since Pasquotank County Sheriff's deputies wielding AR-15 rifles arrived at Brown's home on April 21, 2021 to serve drug-related search and arrest warrants.

Brown was unarmed. He shot five times in his car as he attempted to flee.

A year after the shooting, the involved deputies — two white officers and one Black officer — were not fired by Sheriff Tommy Wooten. Their actions were ruled lawful by then District Attorney Andrew Womble, who said there would be no charges against them.

Only partial and redacted body camera footage of Brown's shooting was authorized for release to the media or public by a judge.

In 2022, the Brown family settled a civil lawsuit with the county for \$3 million.

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"It is definitely still an open wound," said Michael Harrell, vice president of the Pasquotank County NAACP. "You hear people still talking about it. It's open wounds, lot of unanswered questions, and a lot of feelings involved."

Sheriff Tommy Wooten did not respond to requests for an interview with WUNC News for this story.

What changed — and didn't — in Elizabeth City

Since 2021, some of the notable changes in Elizabeth City have happened in local government: the election of new city council candidates representing Black districts, including the election of community advocate Kirk Rivers in 2022, and his subsequent re-election in 2025.

Rivers is the first Black mayor to serve a second mayoral term, according to state election records.

The Citizens' Advisory Council for Pasquotank County was also created in 2022. It's a 13-member law enforcement oversight council to field complaints regarding the Sheriff's Office.



"Maybe (the city) changed, and also not changed," said Markie Riddick, 46, who said he was a childhood friend of Brown's. "It changed because the trust in the (criminal justice) system ... showed more of how the system's a failure."

Riddick argues the criminal justice system was designed to favor law enforcement officers at fault if they killed someone like Brown, since they could lean on his criminal past to defend themselves.

Brown, who had been in and out of jail and prison for most of his adult life, wasn't being sought for violent crimes.

"The system's just so messed up," Riddick said. "I have had my ups and downs in the system. I have my failures in the system. I've been in the system. So, me speaking is not coming from an outside person looking in."

In the aftermath of the shooting, former District Attorney Womble referred to Brown as a "violent felon", accusing him of using his car as a "deadly weapon" against officers, jus-

tifying the shooting under the law.

"I think we all kind of grew up poor, especially in the neighborhood we lived in," said Riddick. "Trauma itself is the whole branch of Elizabeth City, because there's no safety net for nobody here as of right now."

A call for accountability

Elizabeth City tattoo artist Jimmy Bones, who painted a mural of Brown on the side of his former home, says mistrust in law enforcement has persisted.

"It's not sitting well with people in those demographics, because we're not seeing a change and how those areas are policed, and how those people that live there are handled," Bones told WUNC News. "I haven't seen much of a dialogue open between the two."

Bones points out the similarities in the January shooting death of Renee Good, who was shot and killed in her car by Border Patrol officers in Minneapolis during federal immigration operations.

(See **ANDREW BROWN JR.** P. 9)

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NC EXPANDS LEAD PROGRAMS

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Over the past decade, the program has expanded beyond Fayetteville and is now being adopted by agencies across the state.

In March, state officials announced a \$1.5 million investment to grow LEAD programs into additional communities, including departments in Albemarle, Gaston County, Greensboro, New Hanover County, Robeson County and Harnett County, among others.

Under LEAD, officers can make referrals in two primary ways. In some cases, individuals are diverted at the point of potential arrest for offenses such as drug possession, trespassing or petty theft. In others, officers or outreach workers connect people to the program through “social contact” referrals when they encounter individuals at risk of arrest due to untreated mental health or substance use issues. Participation is voluntary, and the program does not require abstinence. Instead, case managers work with participants to identify goals and connect them to services, checking in regularly to support progress.

“It’s completely participant-centered,” said Greg Berry, a statewide director with the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition. “They determine the direction, and the case manager works with them to put a plan together.”

Across the United States, about 60% of people in jails and prisons have a substance use disorder, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. In many communities, law enforcement officers are often the first responders to issues rooted in addiction, homelessness and mental health. Research on LEAD programs in North Carolina suggests the model can reduce that cycle.

A 2022 study by Duke University found that arrests and citations declined by about one-third in the six months after individuals were referred to LEAD, compared with similar individuals who were not referred. The study also found a 50% reduction in the use and cost of crisis services among participants, while costs increased among those who declined to participate.

State health officials say the program is part of a broader effort to address addiction as a public health issue. North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services leaders have pointed to diversion programs, expanded behavioral health services and the use of opioid settlement funds as key strategies.

“LEAD recognizes that substance use challenges are public health issues with public safety consequences,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Dev Sangvai.

From 2022 to 2025, local governments across North Carolina have spent more than \$2.1 million in opioid settlement funds on diversion programs, according to state data.

Hundreds Gather in Durham For 30th Annual Komen Race For The Cure

By Judaea Ingram

Special To The Carolinian

For many gathered Saturday morning at Durham Bulls Athletic Park, the walk was more than a race. It was a tribute, marked by names on bibs, pink clothing, and the shared understanding that nearly everyone there had been touched by breast cancer in some way.

More than 2,000 participants attended the 30th anniversary of the Susan G. Komen Triangle Race for the Cure, a community event centered on awareness, remembrance, and hope.

The annual 5K walk and run, part of the national Susan G. Komen initiative, raises funds for breast cancer research, patient support, and community outreach. This year, the Triangle event raised \$360,602.81 to support those efforts.

Participants arrived early as the site opened at 7 a.m., leading into the Parade of Hope and opening ceremonies before the race began at 9 a.m. While some chose to run, many walked, often in honor of loved ones.

“We all either know someone or have been affected by breast cancer,” was a shared sentiment throughout the crowd, echoed in conversations as participants prepared to begin the route.

Handwritten names filled race bibs, each representing a story. Some walked for friends, others for family members, and many for survivors still in the fight.

“I’ve lost an aunt to breast cancer and over the years, some of my very best friends on my team have gone through a diagnosis,” said participant Mary R. “While I hate adding names to my Race bib, I know the money I raise supports crucial work to help find the cures to end breast cancer.”

The race followed a large loop through surrounding areas, with participants making their way along



the course as volunteers provided water, Gatorade, and other electrolyte drinks at stations along the route.

Support extended beyond official race staff. Residents in nearby neighborhoods stepped outside to wave, smile, and cheer on participants as they passed, adding to the sense of community that defined the event.

The walk also served as a space to uplift survivors and those currently facing breast cancer. The organization highlights stories like that of Tina Pickett, a breast cancer survivor first diagnosed in 2020 and again in 2025, who continues to advocate for early detection and support for others navigating the disease.

“I am still a believer that early

detection can save lives,” Pickett shared in a message supporting the event.

Events like the Race for the Cure are rooted in the legacy of Susan Goodman Komen, who died from breast cancer in 1980 at age 36. Her sister, Nancy G. Brinker, founded the organization in 1982, fulfilling a promise to help find a cure and improve outcomes for those affected by the disease.

While progress has been made, disparities remain. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States, affecting roughly one in eight women. Though incidence rates between Black and white women are similar, Black women face significantly high-

er mortality rates, about 38 percent higher overall, and nearly double among women under 50.

Advances in early detection and treatment have reduced deaths in recent years, but advocates note that these improvements have not reached all communities equally.

Saturday’s event reflected both that reality and a shared determination to continue the fight. Participants of all ages came together in a show of unity, many wearing shirts with the message: “Stronger together. Ending breast cancer needs all of us.”

By the end of the morning, the message was clear. Beyond fundraising, the walk remains a reminder that no one faces breast cancer alone.

We're Moving



After 86 years of serving the African American community in North Carolina, *The Carolinian* is still going and still growing! *The Carolinian* newspaper continues to evolve so that we can keep our communities connected, enlightened and prospering. Starting Monday May 4th, 2026, our office will be located at 1015 Cross Link Road in Raleigh. We are leaving our old building, but we are never leaving our community!

N.C. Lawmakers Exit Democratic Party

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Two outgoing state lawmakers out of Mecklenburg County have changed their political affiliation to unaffiliated after losing their Democratic primaries by wide margins.

State Reps. Carla Cunningham and Nasif Majeed announced their departures from the Democratic Party days apart, with Cunningham changing her registration on Friday and Majeed following on Monday. Both are nearing the end of their current terms after being defeated in March primaries by primary challengers.

In statements, both lawmakers cited concerns about political conduct and a growing disconnect with their party.

Cunningham said she had experienced “a troubling wave of hostility” and described what she viewed as inconsistencies within the political landscape over the past four years. Majeed echoed similar concerns, saying he could not remain aligned with a party where issues of fairness were not adequately addressed.

Their decisions follow decisive primary losses in their respective districts. Cunningham, who has served seven terms representing House District 106, was unseated by Rev. Rodney Sadler, who received more than 70% of the vote. Majeed, a four-term representative from District 99, lost to Valeria Levy, who secured roughly two-thirds of the vote. Both challengers were backed by progressive organizations and, in Cunningham’s case, by Gov. Josh Stein.

The outcomes reflect a broader trend seen in several Democratic primaries across the state, where incumbents who had crossed party lines on key votes were defeated. In addition to Cunningham and Majeed, other lawmakers who supported Republican-backed legislation or veto overrides—including Rep. Shelly Willingham—also lost their seats.

Much of the voter backlash centered on high-profile votes during the 2025–2026 legislative session.

Both Cunningham and Majeed supported the “Power Bill Reduction Act,” which eliminated an interim carbon reduction target for Duke Energy. Majeed also voted with Republicans to override a veto on legislation defining sex and gender in state law, while Cunningham cast a deciding vote to override a veto on House Bill 318, which requires local sheriffs to cooperate with federal immigration authorities. Cunningham’s remarks during debate on that bill, including comments about cultural assimilation, drew criticism from some constituents and advocacy groups.

Challengers in both races pointed to those votes as key issues in the campaigns: Levy said constituents were frustrated by decisions that added costs or diverged from party priorities, while Sadler framed his campaign as a shift away from what he described as divisive policies.

The primary results were shaped in part by coordinated organizing efforts. Advocacy groups including labor unions and environmental organizations invested significant resources in voter outreach, includ-



ing hundreds of thousands of door knocks and direct mail campaigns highlighting incumbents’ voting records.

Political analysts and organizers say the results signal growing expectations among Democratic primary voters for party alignment. Despite breaking a Republican supermajority in the state House, some Democrats’ votes with Republicans effectively allowed veto overrides to continue, prompting frustration among segments of the party’s base.

Cunningham’s party switch does not immediately change the balance of power in the state House, where Republicans hold 71 of 120 seats—just one short of a veto-proof supermajority. However, her future caucus alignment remains unclear and could influence legislative dynamics if she chooses to work more

closely with Republicans.

Republican leaders welcomed the party changes. House Speaker Destin Hall praised both lawmakers for what he described as independent decision-making.

“Today’s Democratic Party has no room for those who don’t toe the line of the far left’s agenda,” Hall said. “I applaud my colleagues, Rep. Cunningham and Rep. Majeed, for putting their constituents first.”

Cunningham, a registered nurse who has been active on health policy, said her decision was rooted in a desire to serve constituents rather than a political party. Majeed similarly emphasized ethical concerns in his statement. Neither lawmaker has announced plans beyond the end of their current terms, though both said they intend to continue serving their districts until then.

NC Falls Back To 46th In Teacher Pay

NC Newsline—North Carolina is the only state in the country where teacher pay is expected to drop this year, according to a new report from the National Education Association.

The 2026 report ranks North Carolina 46th in the nation for average teacher pay. The state fell three spots from last year.

Average salaries in the state are projected at \$59,971 for the 2025-26 school year. That is a decrease from \$60,323 the year before. Meanwhile, the national average public school teacher salary rose 3.5% to \$74,495 in 2023-24.

The projected decline comes as lawmakers have yet to pass a state budget, leaving teacher pay largely unchanged while costs continue to rise.

Nationally, teachers are earning about 5% less than they did 10 years ago when adjusted for inflation. North Carolina now trails every neighboring state in educator pay. Teachers would need a 21% raise just to match the average salary in Georgia, \$72,758.

Stephanie Wallace, a Forsyth County teacher, said she works multiple jobs to make ends meet, including weekend shifts at a Chili’s restaurant. She said her pay has risen about 9% since 2018, while her

living costs have increased far more over the same period.

“If you look at my pay increase as a veteran teacher,” Wallace said, “I am, in fact, making less than I was making about a decade ago.”

The report also shows the state ranks 46th in per-student funding. North Carolina spends about \$13,680 per student, which is nearly \$5,500 below the national average.

Leaders with the North Carolina Association of Educators blamed the rankings on policy choices. They pointed to tax cuts and the use of public money for private school vouchers.

“The downward trend in our rankings reflects the choices of a General Assembly that has spent years funneling public money away from public schools through corporate tax cuts and the expansion of private school vouchers,” said Tamika Walker Kelly, the group’s president, this morning in a virtual press conference.

NC Newsline reached out to House Speaker Destin Hall for comment, but he did not respond immediately.

State Superintendent Mo Green called the 46th-place ranking “unacceptable.”

“North Carolina is not paying its teachers what they deserve, and we



are losing ground while other states move forward,” Green said in a statement to NC Newsline.

Green expressed hope that a budget proposal by Gov. Josh Stein would gain traction in the General Assembly.

Stein has proposed a new budget that includes about \$2.3 billion for public education. The plan calls for

an average 11% raise for teachers and would raise starting teacher pay to the highest level in the Southeast.

Green noted that teachers achieved record-high graduation rates and AP performance last year despite being underpaid.

“Imagine what they could do with the compensation they have earned,” he said.

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Business & Finance

How Americans Are Spending Their 2026 Tax Refunds

THE HILL - On average, Americans are receiving larger tax refunds this year. So, how will they spend them?

The Treasury Department said in a release on Tax Day that as of April 14, the average tax refund this filing season was more than \$3,400, an increase of 11 percent from last year.

Filers can check the status of their refund using the "Where's My Refund" tool on either IRS.gov or the IRS2Go app. They must provide their Social Security number or taxpayer identification number, their filing status and the exact amount of their refund.

Treasury also said that more than 53 million filers utilized at least one of the provisions offered under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), which President Trump signed into law last July.

More than 25 million filers, for instance, deducted their overtime pay — averaging out to more than \$3,100 per filer. Under the law, individuals can deduct up to \$12,500 of the "half" portion of their "time-and-a-half" overtime pay.

The provision phases out for those with an income of more than \$150,000, or \$300,000 for joint filers.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that the law "provided meaningful relief to middle- and low-income taxpayers, increasing take-home pay and putting more money back into the pockets" of families, workers and small business owners.



Elaine Maag, a senior fellow at the left-leaning Urban Institute's Tax Policy Center, told The Hill on Wednesday that since the OBBBA was "retroactive" and covered all of 2025, while filers' withholdings did not change, refunds were larger.

The law also boosted the child tax credit from \$2,000 to \$2,200 per child. Maag said that the credit, combined with the earned income tax credit that the IRS set at \$8,231 for taxpayers with three or more children, accounts for slightly more than 20 percent, on average, of the annual income of someone making below the federal poverty line — which is \$33,000 for a family of

four, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

"This might be the most important financial transaction of the year," Maag said of those two credits.

Yet while refunds are greater, so are prices. The inflation rate in March was 3.3 percent, a jump of 0.9 percentage points from February.

The price of food last month was also up 2.7 percent, while the cost of energy was up 12.5 percent — a full 12 percentage points higher than February — amid the war with Iran. The conflict, which began on Feb. 28, has resulted in the Iranian military restricting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil typically

flows, leading to a subsequent increase in gas prices stateside.

Taken all together, that means that the bump in refunds is being "eaten up by higher everyday costs," according to Amy Matsui, the vice president for child care and income at the left-leaning National Women's Law Center.

Matsui told The Hill via email Thursday that as the economy "weakens," Americans are less likely to spend their refunds "in ways that would boost consumer demands," such as eating out or traveling.

A poll conducted by Experian last month found that one-third of 1,000 respondents planned on saving their refunds, an increase of 2 percentage points relative to the same survey it took last year. One in 5 respondents said they would use their refund to pay down debt, while 17 percent said they would use it to pay for necessities and 10 percent said they would invest it.

Just 6 percent, meanwhile, said they planned on using their refund for "splurge" spending, down 3 percentage points from last year.

Matsui wrote that while saving your tax refund is a "smart and responsible financial choice," the prevalence of the practice "underscores that these slightly higher refunds are not delivering the economic stimulus the administration promised."

Garrett Watson, director of policy analysis at the right-leaning Tax Foundation, told The Hill Thursday that the "key question" about higher

refunds is whether Americans use them to "build up a savings buffer" amid the aforementioned higher costs.

"If they do, that would limit the amount of additional spending they were to engage in," Watson said via email.

The OBBBA was not just about taxes, either. New work requirements tied to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), for instance, will reduce participation by roughly 2.4 million people in an average month through 2034, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Maag said that the cuts to SNAP and

Medicaid under the law, along with the lapse in pandemic-era subsidies offered under the Affordable Care Act, are disproportionately impacting "very low-income" families. The tax benefits of the law, on the other hand, will be reaped by middle- and higher-income families, she predicted.

The CBO projected last June, before the law was passed, that resources for households in the lowest decile of the income distribution would decrease by about \$1,600 per year through 2034.

"Any narrow or short-term gains some households may have seen in this year's tax returns are vastly out-

Classifieds



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The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in Nash County out for bid: C- C11855 Support Buildings' Fire Alarm Replacement . The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 05/21/2026 . To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: North Carolina Department of Public Safety - eVP



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The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in Bertie County out for bid: C- C11853 Bertie Fire Alarm Replacement . The bid opening is scheduled for: Wednesday, 05/27/2026 . To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://evp.nc.gov/solicitations/details/?id=1e848d17-f431-f111-88b3-001dd800b811>

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Pipeline Utilities, Inc. (NC General Contractor License No. 325) is seeking certified DBE, MBE, and WBE subcontractors and suppliers for the **Downtown Streetscape - Phase 1** project for the **City of Burlington** which bids on **May 21, 2026, at 1:00 PM**. Plans and specifications for this project are available at the following locations: Pipeline Utilities, Inc.; 2204-F Associate Drive; Raleigh, NC 27603 * WithersRavenel, 115 MacKenan Drive, Cary, NC 27511 or withersravenel.com * QuestCDN website.

Potential subcontracting opportunities include but are not limited to surveying, hauling, asphalt paving, striping, erosion control, electrical, landscaping, linework/pipe installation, masonry, and flatwork. Please contact **Ethan Grissom** (egrissom@pui-nc.com) if you are interested in submitting a proposal on any portion(s) of this project. Contact via phone 919-772-4310; fax: 919-772-3261; or email. All quotations will be accepted up to the closing time of the bid date. Pipeline Utilities, Inc. is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

Please advise if assistance is needed with obtaining necessary equipment, supplies, materials, or insurance/bonding to satisfy the work requirements. We are willing to accept quotations for all or partial quantities and items of work. We can offer 2-party check payments and quick payment agreements, but the agreements need to be negotiated prior to the bid date.

D/M/WBE

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T. A. Loving Company (NC General Contractor License No. 325) is seeking certified DBE, MBE, and WBE subcontractors and suppliers for the **Drinking Water Distribution System Rehabilitation and Improvements** project for the **Town of Elm City** which bids on **May 7, 2026, at 2:00 PM**. Plans and specifications for this project are available at the following locations: T. A. Loving Company; 400 Patetown Road; Goldsboro, NC 27530 * Mack Gay Associates, PA; 1667 Thomas A. Betts Parkway; Rocky Mount, NC 27804 * [ConstructConnect website](http://ConstructConnect.com).

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Please advise if assistance is needed with obtaining necessary equipment, supplies, materials, or insurance/bonding to satisfy the work requirements. We are willing to accept quotations for all or partial quantities and items of work. We can offer 2-party check payments and quick payment agreements, but the agreements need to be negotiated prior to the bid date.

NC Education Lottery: Where Does Your Education Dollar Actually Go?

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Since its inception in 2005, the North Carolina Education Lottery has been marketed as a winning ticket for our state's schools. But as the lottery grows into a multi-billion dollar enterprise, many North Carolinians are left wondering: is the money actually making its way to the classroom, or is it just a shell game? According to recent data from Public Schools First NC, the answer is more complex than a simple "yes" or "no." While the lottery is generating record-breaking sales, the slice of the pie dedicated to education is getting thinner.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year, the NC Lottery generated a staggering \$6.59 billion in sales, a 22% jump from the previous year. Despite this massive growth, actual funding for education

programs dropped from \$1.09 billion to \$1.08 billion. The root of this disconnect lies in legislative changes. Originally, 35% of lottery proceeds were required to go to education. In 2007, the legislature downgraded this requirement to a "guideline." Consequently, the percentage of revenue allocated to schools has steadily declined from 2024 (down 20.2%) to 2025 (down 16.4%). Currently, the vast majority of lottery revenue, 75.8% or \$5 billion, is returned to players as prize money. Administrative costs and retail commissions account for the remaining 7.9%.

When that 16.4% finally reaches the education sector, it is distributed among five key areas. It is important to note that local school systems do not decide where this money goes; those decisions are made by state legislators in Raleigh. Allocations follow:

1. School Construction, 51%, \$549.3 Million (Building new schools and repairing older facilities)
2. Non-Instructional Support, 36%, \$385.9 Million (Salaries for custodians, office assistants, and bus drivers)
3. NC Pre-K, 7%, \$78.2 Million (Funding seats for at-risk four-year-olds)
4. College Scholarships, 4%, \$41.2 Million (Financial aid for public colleges and universities)
5. LEA Transportation, 2%, \$21.4 Million (Supporting school bus operations across the state)

The biggest point of contention for critics is whether lottery money is supplementing the state's education budget or simply substituting for funds that should have come from the general fund. When the lottery was first proposed, it was presented as an "extra" boost

for schools. However, a provision that required lottery funds to be a supplement, not a replacement, was removed in 2005 before the bill became law. This allows legislators to use lottery dollars to cover costs that might otherwise have been paid for through standard state taxes. Based on insights from Public Schools First NC, "Even if the lottery returned to its original 35% allocation, it would only cover about 14% of North Carolina's total K-12 public school expenditures."

While the "Education Lottery" provides critical funds for school roofs and support staff, it is far from a total solution for our state's educational needs. As sales continue to climb, the conversation in Raleigh may need to shift from how much money is being made to how much of it actually serves the students of North Carolina.

What's Lost When AI Does Our Shopping

THE CONVERSATION - Americans spend a remarkable amount of time shopping — more than on education, volunteering or even talking on the phone. But the way they shop is shifting dramatically, as major platforms and retailers are racing to automate commercial decision-making.

Artificial intelligence agents can already search for products, recommend options and even complete purchases on a consumer's behalf. Yet many shoppers remain uneasy about handing over control. Although many consumers report using some AI assistance, most currently say they wouldn't want an AI agent to autonomously complete a shopping transaction, according to a recent survey from the consultancy firm Bain & Company.

As scholars studying the intersection of law and technology, we have watched AI-assisted commerce expand rapidly. Our research finds that without updated legal measures, this shift toward automated commerce could quietly erode the economic, psychological and social benefits that people receive from shopping on their own terms.

Caveat emptor
Part of shoppers' hesitation is about privacy. Many are unwilling to share sensitive personal or financial information with AI platforms. But more profoundly, people want to feel in control of their shopping choices. When users can't understand the reasoning behind AI-driven product recommendations, their trust and satisfaction decline.

Shoppers are also reluctant to give away their autonomy. In one study involving people booking travel plans, participants deliberately chose trip options that were misaligned with their stated preferences once they were told their choices could be predicted — a way of reasserting independence.

Other experiments confirm that the more customers perceive their shopping choices being taken away from them, the more reluctant they are to accept AI purchasing assistance.

Although the technology is ex-

pected to get better, there have been some well-publicized missteps reported in financial and tech media. The Wall Street Journal wrote about an AI-powered vending machine that lost money and stocked itself with a live fish. The tech publication Wired cataloged design flaws, like an AI agent taking a full 45 seconds to add eggs to a customer's shopping cart.

The business case for AI shopping
Consumers have good reason to be cautious. AI agents aren't just designed to assist; they're designed to influence. Research shows that these systems can shape preferences, steer choices, increase spending and even reduce the likelihood that consumers return products.

And companies are hyping these capabilities. The business platform Salesforce promotes AI agents that can "effortlessly upsell," while payments giant Mastercard reports that its AI assistant, Shopping Muse, generates 15% to 20% higher conversion rates than traditional search — that is, pushing shoppers from browsing to completing a purchase.

For companies, the appeal is obvious. From Amazon's Rufus app and Walmart's customer support to AI-enabled grocery carts, companies are rapidly integrating these tools into the shopping experience.

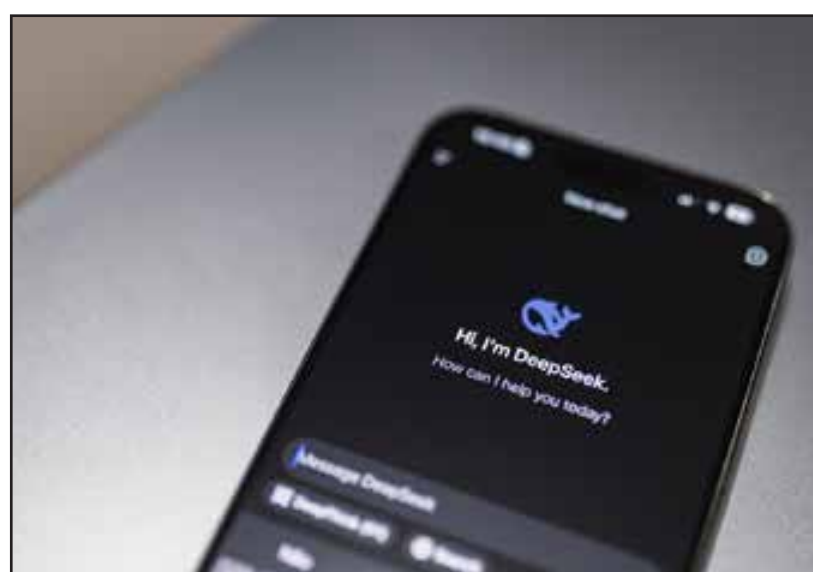
Assistants with names like Sparky and Ralph are being promoted as the future of retail, while technologists are calling on companies to prepare their brands for the era of agentic AI shopping.

The real concern is not that these systems might fail, but that they may succeed all too well.

The human side to shopping
AI shopping agents do offer considerable benefits.

For example, they can scan numerous products in seconds, compare prices across sellers, track discounts over time, sift through thousands of product reviews, and tailor recommendations to the user's preferences and needs. They can even read through terms of service and privacy policies, helping consumers detect unfavorable fine print.

But there's more at stake than these considerations.



While consumers have reason to focus on privacy and control, AI shopping agents carry some overlooked emotional risks, such as squashing the joy of anticipation. Psychologists have shown that the period between choosing a purchase and receiving it generates substantial happiness — sometimes more than the product or experience itself. We daydream about the vacation we booked, the outfit we ordered, the meal we planned. Automated buying threatens to drain this anticipatory pleasure.

This anticipation connects to another value: a sense of personal and ethical authorship. Even mundane shopping decisions allow people to exercise choice and express judgment. Many consumers deliberately buy fair-trade coffee, cruelty-free cosmetics or environmentally responsible products. The brands and products we choose, from Patagonia and Harley-Davidson to a Taylor Swift tour shirt, help shape who we are.

Shopping, moreover, has a communal dimension. We browse stores with friends, chat with salespeople and shop for the people we love. These everyday interactions contribute considerably to our well-being.

The same is true of gift-giving. Choosing a gift involves anticipating another person's preferences, invest-

ing effort in the search and recognizing that the gesture matters as much as the object itself. When this process is outsourced to an autonomous system, the gift risks becoming a delivery rather than a meaningful gesture of attention and care.

Keeping human agency alive
AI shopping agents are likely to become part of everyday life, and the regulatory conversation is beginning to catch up, albeit unevenly.

Transparency has emerged as a central concern. Past experience with recommendation engines shows that undisclosed conflicts of interest are a real risk. The European Union has proposed a disclosure framework around automated decision-making, although its implementation was recently delayed. In Congress, U.S. lawmakers are considering bills to require companies to reveal how their AI models were trained.

So far, consumers seem to want to choose their own level of engagement — a signal that shopping, for many people, is more than just the efficient satisfaction of preferences. Perhaps the least-settled, yet most crucial question is whether AI shopping tools will be designed and regulated to serve users' interests and human flourishing — or optimized, as so many digital tools before them, primarily for corporate profit.

AbbVie to Build a New \$1.4Billion Manufacturing Campus in Durham

RALEIGH, N.C.— Today Governor Josh Stein announced AbbVie Inc. (NYSE: ABBV), a global biopharmaceutical company, will create 734 jobs in a new pharmaceutical operation in Durham County. The company says it will invest \$1.4 billion to build a 185-acre state-of-the-art manufacturing campus in the City of Durham.

“We welcome AbbVie’s major investment to North Carolina,” said Governor Josh Stein. “When you combine our world-renowned research and innovation with a strong, thriving life sciences hub, North Carolina quickly becomes the premier location for biopharmaceutical companies to do business.”

Headquartered in Illinois, AbbVie is one of the world’s largest biopharmaceutical companies. It has a leading product portfolio that includes several key therapeutic areas – including immunology, neuroscience and oncology – and offers products and services in the company’s Allergan Aesthetics portfolio. This is AbbVie’s first major investment in North Carolina and is part of its \$100 billion commitment to U.S. research and development (R&D) and capital investments, including

manufacturing, over the next decade. The 185-acre campus will integrate advanced manufacturing and laboratory technologies with artificial intelligence to support the production of AbbVie’s immunology, neuroscience, and oncology medicines.

“AbbVie’s investment in North Carolina represents a significant milestone for our company as our largest capital investment to date and an important expansion of our manufacturing footprint into a new region of the United States,” said Robert A. Michael, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of AbbVie. “By establishing this campus, we are strengthening our ability to support future medical breakthroughs while also creating new jobs and a long-term partnership with Durham and the State of North Carolina.”

“This decision further cements North Carolina’s position at the forefront of the global life sciences industry,” said N.C. Commerce Secretary Lee Lilley. “As our pharmaceutical sector grows, we remain fully committed to cultivating the highly skilled workforce, infrastructure, and ecosystem needed to deliver lifesaving medicines

to patients around the world for companies like AbbVie.”

Positions with the company will include engineers, lab technicians, manufacturing operators, and scientists. Although salaries for the positions will vary, the average annual salary will be \$118,041, exceeding the Durham County average of \$102,817. These new jobs could create a potential annual payroll impact of more than \$86.6 million for the region.

AbbVie’s operation in North Carolina will be facilitated, in part, by a Job Development Investment Grant (JDIG), which was approved by the state’s Economic Investment Committee earlier today. Over the course of the 12-year term of this grant, the project is estimated to grow the state’s economy by \$8 billion. Using a formula that takes into account the new tax revenues generated by the new jobs and capital investment of \$1.295 billion, the JDIG agreement authorizes the potential reimbursement to the company of up to \$19,347,000, spread over 12 years. State payments occur only following performance verification each year by the departments of Commerce and Revenue that the



company has met its incremental job creation and investment targets.

The project’s projected return on investment of public dollars is 189 percent, meaning for every dollar of potential cost to the state, the state receives \$2.89 in state revenue. JDIG projects result in positive net tax revenue to the state treasury, even after taking into consideration the grant’s reimbursement payments to a given company.

Because AbbVie chose a site in Dur-

ham County, classified by the state’s economic tier system as Tier 3, the company’s JDIG agreement also calls for moving as much as \$6,449,000 into the state’s Industrial Development Fund – Utility Account. The Utility Account helps rural communities anywhere in the state finance necessary infrastructure upgrades to attract future business.

“We welcome this investment and new jobs to Durham County,” said Senator Natalie Murdock. “A \$1 billion investment underscores the strength of our universities and community college systems and pioneering research engines that make this region an attractive place to innovate, scale, and lead in a rapidly demanding industry.”

“The life sciences economy thrives when partnerships are strong,” said Representative Zack Hawkins. “In Durham and across the Triangle, collaboration between industry, academia, and local and state government translates into jobs, investment, and long-term economic resilience.”

In addition to the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, other key partners in this project include the North Carolina General Assembly, Commerce’s Division of Workforce Solutions, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, the North Carolina Community College System, Durham Technical Community College, North Carolina Central University, Duke University, Duke Energy, Enbridge Gas North Carolina, Durham County, the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Durham.



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Health and Wellness

NC Sees Drop in Infant Mortality, But Racial Gaps Persist

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

A fundraiser was held in Durham highlighting the human toll behind North Carolina's maternal and infant health disparities, as participants walked past signs bearing the names of Black women who died from pregnancy-related causes.

The event was organized by MAAME, a Durham-based nonprofit that provides doula support and maternal health services, works primarily with Black mothers and families. The organization's name is both as an acronym and as a word meaning "mother" in the Twi language.

At the event, attendees like Durham resident Laura Gonzalez Dutor described how doula care helped ease anxiety during pregnancy by providing additional guidance and advocacy alongside medical providers.

"I knew that there was always going to be someone, in addition to my partner, that would be able to advocate for me and just help me make informed decisions," Gonzalez Dutor said.

Research indicates that doula care—trained, non-clinical professionals providing continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to families before, during, and shortly after childbirth—is associated with lower rates of cesarean sections, fewer birth complications, and improved infant health, particularly among low-income mothers.

Despite these benefits, access remains uneven, with private insurance rarely covering doula services and Medicaid coverage limited within North Carolina.

Across the United States, maternal mortality rates remain higher than in other wealthy countries, and Black women face significantly greater risk. According to federal data, Black women nationwide die from pregnancy-related causes at roughly three times the rate of white women. In North Carolina, that disparity persists, with Black women accounting for a disproportionate share of maternal deaths.

Although Black residents make up about 22% of the state's population, Black women represented approximately 43% of pregnancy-related deaths between 2020 and 2022.

Between 2019 and 2021, North Carolina's rate rose sharply from 22 to 44 deaths per 100,000 live births. Earlier reviews by the state's Maternal Mortality Review Committee found that nearly 80% of pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.

However, North Carolina reported a decline in infant mortality from 6.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2023



to 6.3 in 2024, marking the lowest rate ever recorded in the state. Health officials attributed the 8.7% decrease in part to a 14.9% drop in neonatal deaths, meaning more infants are surviving the first 28 days of life. Expanded Medicaid coverage and improved access to prenatal and postpartum care have been cited as contributing factors.

Nevertheless, Black infants in North Carolina are still nearly three times more likely to die before their first birthday than white infants.

"We are not making progress where we need to on unacceptable disparities," said Dr. Kelly Kimple, acting director for NCDHHS' Division of Public Health.

These disparities are particularly visible in rural areas, where access to maternal care is often limited. Hospital closures, provider shortages, and longer travel distances can delay or prevent timely care. State and federal initiatives have increasingly focused on expanding the maternal health workforce in these regions,



including training nurse midwives and improving telehealth access for mental health and substance use treatment.

Wake County generally has greater access to hospitals and providers than rural counties, though disparities by race and income persist. State funding initiatives and federal grants have directed resources to urban centers like Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, while also attempting to extend services into underserved communities statewide.

North Carolina expanded Medicaid eligibility in recent years, resulting in more than 700,000 additional residents gaining coverage. The state also extended postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to one year, a move aimed at addressing complications that often arise after childbirth.

Public health campaigns such as "I Gave Birth" and the state's Perinatal Health Strategic Plan have sought to improve awareness and care coordination.

Federal funding has also played a role as more than \$4 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has been allocated to North Carolina through multiple programs, including maternal mental health services, workforce training, and initiatives designed to improve care quality in birthing facilities.

"Mental Health Chooses You"

A Lifelong Advocate Reflects on 27 Years with NAMI

By Judaea Ingram

Special To The Carolinian

For Lillian M. Davis, mental health advocacy is not just a career, it is a lifelong responsibility shaped by personal experience, family, and a commitment to community care.

Growing up in Johnston County, North Carolina, Davis described her childhood as rooted in a close-knit environment, but not always culturally diverse. That experience, she said, played a role in her decision to attend a historically Black college and university.

She went on to attend North Carolina A&T State University, where she studied psychology and criminal justice. Davis said her time at the institution helped shape her leadership identity and reinforced her sense of belonging.

"I loved it," she said of her HBCU experience. "It started the type of leader that I would become."

Her interest in mental health, however, was also deeply personal. At the age of 13, Davis became closely involved in supporting her father, a disabled veteran diagnosed with PTSD. She described becoming an advocate for him at a young age, helping her family navigate his condition and the stigma surrounding it.

"My dad was totally opposite of what people expected," she said. "People stigmatized PTSD, but he lived with it. I don't want to define him by it."

After college, Davis initially entered the public school system as a special education teacher before transitioning into mental health full time. She later worked in inpatient behavioral health settings, eventually rising into leadership roles overseeing multiple hospitals and regions.

Her career now spans nearly three decades, including her work with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), where she currently serves in a leadership role at the state level with NAMI North Carolina.

Davis said one of the biggest ongoing challenges in mental health care is access, particularly related to Medicaid coverage and affordability.

"Medicaid is a huge component of a lot of people we serve," she said. "When those benefits are disrupted, people are forced to choose between their health needs and their basic survival needs."

Over the past 27 years, Davis has also witnessed a significant shift in how mental health is discussed and understood.

"It's drastically different now," she said. "We're no longer at the end of the conversation—we're part of the solution."

She added that stigma around mental health has decreased as more people begin to recognize that conditions such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety are medical issues rather than personal failures.

Davis emphasized that cultural perceptions have also shifted, particularly within Black communities, where churches and community organizations have become more open to mental health discussions and partnerships.

"We learned the church has been the pillar of support," she said. "Now we're working together more intentionally."

One of Davis's central messages is that mental health and physical health are deeply connected.

"You can't have one without the other," she said. "To live a successful life, you have to be mentally and physically well."

Beyond her professional work, Davis also serves as a leader in civic and community spaces, including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, where she connects service work with mental health advocacy.

Looking forward, Davis said her goal is to continue reducing stigma and expanding access to care so that mental health support becomes more normalized and accessible.

"I think mental health chooses you," she said. "Every day I walk into what I live."



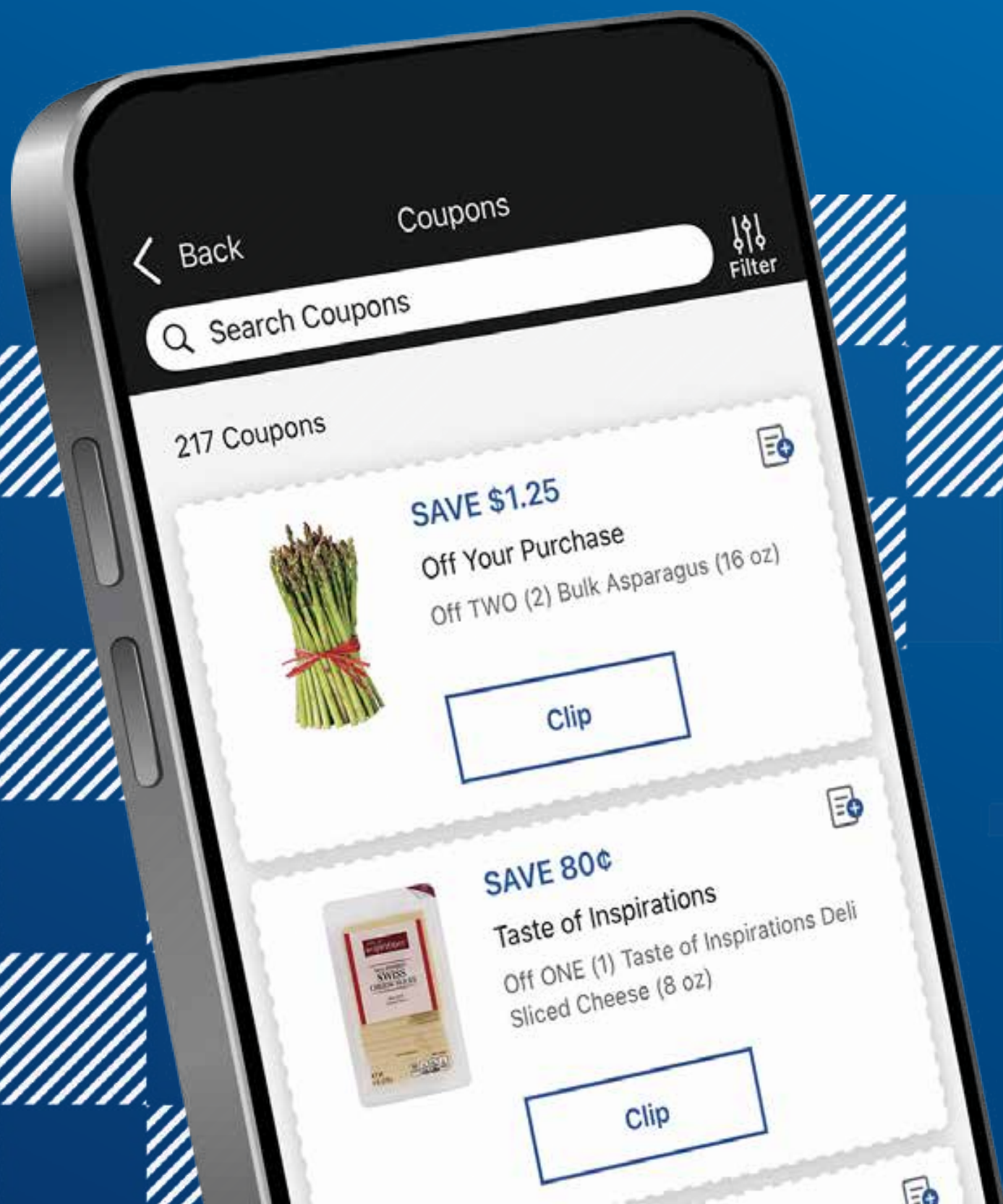
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Arts & Culture

NCACC Student Film Festival Celebrates Student Storytelling and Creative Voices Across North Carolina

By Dominique Heath

Columnist

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) brought student filmmakers, educators, local leaders and community members together at The Cary Theater for the Second Annual NCACC 100 Strong Productions Student Film Festival, a statewide event centered around storytelling, local history and community impact through film.

Hosted by NCACC's documentary division, 100 Strong Productions, the festival gave students from counties across North Carolina an opportunity to showcase their work across county lines while sharing stories unique to their own communities. The event featured filmmaking workshops, keynote presentations, student film screenings, filmmaker discussions and an awards ceremony celebrating young creators from across the state.

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners represents all 100 counties across the state, working to strengthen county government through advocacy, education, leadership development and collaboration between counties. Organizers throughout the festival emphasized that county government is often the closest level of government to residents, shaping daily life through schools, roads, parks, health services and community programs.

"County government is the level of government closest to home," Chris Baucom, Director of 100 Strong Productions said during the festival. "It shapes your schools, your roads, your parks and the services that your family uses every day."

100 Strong Productions was created in 2021 as the storytelling and documentary production arm of NCACC with the mission of documenting the people, issues and experiences shaping North Carolina counties through film.

"This team was built with a clear mission to explore important topics, to shine a light on the unique stories from across North Carolina's 100 counties through the art of documentary filmmaking," one speaker shared during the opening presentation.

Since its creation, the production company has produced documentaries exploring issues such as food resiliency, veteran services, workforce shifts and the impacts of Hurricane Helene. Organizers explained that the student film festival expands that mission by encouraging young filmmakers to document stories from

their own communities and experiences.

Brielle Barozzini, production coordinator for NCACC 100 Strong Productions, welcomed attendees and thanked students, families, The Cary Theater and NCACC staff for helping bring the festival together after nearly a year of planning. Barozzini said the festival was designed not only to celebrate student creativity, but also to give young filmmakers the opportunity to learn from industry professionals while sharing stories rooted in their own communities.

"We want to tell stories that aren't told by other production companies. The whole purpose is to tell the stories of North Carolina counties from a different perspective."

BLAKE KINSEY WORKSHOP ENCOURAGES YOUNG FILMMAKERS
The day began with a filmmaking workshop titled Making Your First Short Film, led by Durham filmmaker Blake Kinsey, founder of Back Porch Films.

Kinsey, a graduate of Western Carolina University whose films have appeared in several independent film festivals, spoke candidly with students about the realities of filmmaking and the importance of preparation, collaboration and flexibility throughout the production process.

Throughout the workshop, Kinsey broke filmmaking into three major stages: pre-production, production and post-production. He explained how planning, scheduling and organization often determine whether a project runs smoothly once filming begins.

He described production as "organized chaos," while emphasizing the importance of backup plans and adaptability during filming.

Kinsey also challenged students to stop viewing filmmaking as something inaccessible or reserved for large studios. Instead, he encouraged attendees to work creatively with the resources available to them, whether that meant using phones, local businesses, public spaces or family and friends as part of productions.

The workshop also stressed teamwork and communication, with Kinsey explaining that filmmaking is one of the most collaborative forms of storytelling. Students were encouraged to remain open to learning while also staying committed to the stories they wanted to tell.

"Stay true to your vision. Don't compromise if it will dim the final product."

DEBORAH HOLT NOEL REFLECTS ON STORYTELLING AND LEGACY
Following an afternoon inter-



mission, attendees returned for a keynote presentation from Deborah Holt Noel, executive producer of Black Issues Forum and host of PBS NC's Emmy-nominated North Carolina Weekend.

Noel's presentation, titled The Work of Storytelling, became one of the emotional centerpieces of the festival as she reflected on her decades-long career in journalism and documentary filmmaking.

Speaking directly to students, Noel described the fear and uncertainty she experienced early in her filmmaking career while pursuing a graduate degree in television production at the University of Maryland. She recalled moments of self-doubt where she questioned whether she belonged in the industry at all.

"I felt this suffocating silence," Noel said while describing an empty production building after class. "I was feeling like, 'Why am I here? I made a mistake. I should stay where I was because I don't belong here.'"

Noel explained that her perspective changed while creating a documentary about her own family's role in integrating Raleigh public schools. The film, Exhausted Remedies: The Joe Holt Story, focused on her father and her family's civil rights history in North Carolina.

At the time, Noel said she worried nobody would care about the story or understand its importance.

"I spent so much time worrying about whether the story was good enough," she said. "And somewhere along the way, I realized that wasn't my job. My job was to tell the story as truthfully as possible."

The documentary would later help preserve and elevate her family's leg-

acy in Raleigh history through public recognition, historical markers and community remembrance connected to her father's story.

Throughout her keynote, Noel emphasized that storytelling is not about the filmmaker's ego, but about listening carefully and honoring the experiences of the people willing to trust someone with their story.

"When someone trusts you with their story, that matters," Noel told attendees. "It's about listening and it's about care."

She also encouraged students not to dismiss local or personal stories because they may initially seem small.

"You don't know whose life can be changed as a result of you giving it some air and giving it some light," she said.

STUDENT FILMS HIGHLIGHT COMMUNITY STORIES ACROSS NORTH CAROLINA

The centerpiece of the festival was the screening of eight student-produced films from counties across North Carolina. Together, the projects explored themes including economic development, natural disasters, food insecurity, immigration, history, public service and community resilience.

One of the opening films, *Economic Growth* from Johnston County, was created by Tyler Goodson, Lucien Rattray and Kamarri Justice. The documentary explored the direction and expansion of Johnston County while examining how growth is reshaping the county's future and identity.

Johnston County was featured again in *The Hands That Built Our Homes*, created by Nolan Fox,

Damien Marte and Joshua Hodges. Told partly through the perspective of a county commissioner, the documentary explored the rapid development of the county while focusing on the labor, leadership and planning involved in building growing communities.

One of the festival's most emotional films was *Heart of Rock* by Rutherford County filmmakers Nikhil Mehta and Grant Sizemore. The documentary centered around Hurricane Helene and the devastation experienced by residents in the aftermath of the storm. Through interviews and community footage, the filmmakers documented both heartbreak and resilience as neighbors worked together to rebuild homes, businesses and their lives.

Wake County student Eva Awasthi, one of the youngest filmmakers featured at the festival, explored food insecurity among students in *Helping the Hungry: Food Insecurity Among Students in the Wake County Public School System*. The documentary examined the realities many students face when access to food is uncertain while also highlighting the importance of school meal programs and public health initiatives. The film focused not only on hunger itself, but also on how food insecurity affects students emotionally, academically and socially.

Highway 251 by Buncombe County filmmakers Grace Ellen Callihan and Brooke Darby served as both a documentary and a public safety message focused on cyclist safety. The film was created following a devastating accident that killed cyclists Jake Hill and Lennie Antonelli while

seriously injuring Griffin Tichenor. Through interviews and reflective storytelling, the filmmakers urged viewers to prioritize cyclist safety and remain aware of the dangers cyclists face on North Carolina roads.

Johnston County students Evelyn Pascucci and James Anderson highlighted innovation and youth opportunity in *Robotics*, a documentary centered around the importance of robotics programs and clubs for students interested in engineering, technology and future career opportunities.

One of the festival's most historically ambitious projects was *The Story of George Moses Horton* by Chatham County filmmaker Jordan Wiley. The film explored the life of George Moses Horton, an enslaved North Carolina poet who became one of the first published Black authors in the South. Through historical reenactments and storytelling, the documentary brought Horton's legacy to life while educating audiences on a figure often overlooked in mainstream history discussions.

The final featured film, *Against The Flames* by Mecklenburg County filmmaker Lana Butler, told the deeply personal story of a Vietnamese family that immigrated to the United States during the height of communism after finding refuge through an American missionary church. The documentary centered around a mother who postponed her dream of becoming a firefighter while raising her children before eventually becoming a firefighter engineer 14 years later. Told through

(See NCACC FILM FESTIVAL P. 12)



'Michael' moonwalks to \$97 million opening, shattering record for music biopics

NEW YORK (AP) — "Michael," the big-budget Michael Jackson spectacle, shrugged off bad reviews and a troubled production to launch with \$97 million in U.S. and Canada theaters, according to studio estimates Sunday, shattering a record debut for music biopics.

A highly authorized portrayal of the King of Pop, co-produced by the Jackson estate, Lionsgate's "Michael" far surpassed previous biopic top performers like "Straight Outta Compton" (a \$60.2 million debut in 2015) and "Bohemian Rhapsody" (\$51 million in 2018).

International sales were also strong. "Michael" collected \$120.4 million overseas, to give it a \$217.4 million global opening — a new high for a music biopic. Universal picked up distribution in most international markets.

A few weeks back, estimates for "Michael" were closer to \$50 million. Going into the weekend, the studio estimated closer to \$70 million. But it wildly overperformed.

"From the beginning, all of the signals were that something like this was possible," said Adam Fogelson, Lionsgate chairman. "We were seeing massive engagement with every conceivable audience segment that you could identify."

Even in the lucrative market of music biopics, "Michael" was an audacious bet by Lionsgate on an extraordinarily popular but controversial figure. The reputation of Jackson, who died in 2009 at the age of 50, has been repeatedly tarnished by allegations of sexual abuse of children. Jackson and his estate have maintained his innocence, though the pop star acknowledged sharing a bedroom with other people's children. He was acquitted in his sole criminal trial in 2005.

Some Jackson family members opposed the film. Janet Jackson was uninvolved and doesn't appear in it. Jackson's daughter, Paris, called it "fantasy land." But three years after "Leaving Neverland," the 2009 documentary about Jackson's alleged sexual abuse of children, "Bohemian Rhapsody" producer Graham King announced plans for the biopic. Jackson's nephew, Jaafar Jackson, was cast as star.

"Michael" had an unusually rocky production. After shooting was completed, producers realized they had made a costly mistake. The third act focused on the accusations of Jordan Chandler, then 13 years old, whom Jackson paid \$23 million to in a 1994 settlement. The terms of that settlement barred the Jackson estate from ever mentioning Chandler in a movie.

A huge chunk of the film had to be cut. Reshoots for as much as \$50 million were done at the estate's expense. Director Antoine Fuqua and screenwriter John Logan reworked the movie to conclude in 1988, before any accusations were made.

"I would take issue with the idea that we as a studio or as filmmakers were running around in a panic," said Fogelson. "It was definitely a unique and challenging circumstance to figure out how to work through. But it created an opportunity to tell more story than any one film could possibly contain." Yet as bad as things once looked for "Michael," the movie turned into a huge hit. The film's total production cost came close to \$200 million. To defray costs, Lionsgate sold international distribution rights to Universal. A sequel is in development. A third film after that, Fogelson said, is "not inconceivable."

"The audience spoke loud and clear," Fogelson said. "The portion of Michael's life that this story tells couldn't have gotten into those allegations because the allegations themselves hadn't happened in the period this movie existed. I think the audience is judging it on those terms. We'll see what happens as we move into the possibility of subsequent films."

Critics slammed the film for glossing over some of the less convenient aspects of Jackson's life. It scored a paltry 38% on Rotten Tomatoes. But audiences were far more enthusiastic. "Michael" earned an "A-" CinemaScore.

"It's only human nature to enjoy yourself at the movie theater," said Paul Dergarabedian, head of marketplace trends for Comscore. "The movie was perfectly positioned ahead of the start of the summer movie season which launches later this week with the 'The Devil Wears Prada 2' that is also poised to outpace even the most generous opening weekend projections."

The opening for "Michael" added to a strong spring for Hollywood boosted by box-office hits like Amazon MGM's "Project Hail Mary" and Universal's "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie." After three weeks atop the box office, the "Mario" sequel slid to second place, with \$21.2 million. In four weeks, it's collected \$386.5 million domestically and \$445 million internationally.

Meanwhile, "Project Hail Mary" surged past \$600 million worldwide in its sixth weekend of release. The film's total haul for Amazon MGM stands at \$305.3 million domestic and \$613.3 million globally.

The Senator Jeanne H. Lucas Luncheon

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

The Glenwood Ballroom was filled with a sense of "collective courage" this past week as community leaders, activists, and citizens gathered for the NC Black Summit "Senator Jeanne H. Lucas Luncheon: Bridging the Past and Future." Sponsored by the Collective Courage Fund, the event served as a powerful reminder of the deep-rooted history of North Carolina's advocacy and the vibrant future being forged by its next generation. The history markers honored included: Dr. Marvin Connely, Dr. Frankie Denise Powell, Courtney Patterson, and Leonard Springs.

I had the pleasure of meeting several honorees on the first day of the conference. Courtney Patterson, Eastern Organizer for Blueprint NC, shared with us, "To be recognized by young people younger than my children is quite an honor indeed. These are the people who come into this work with passion, and they give me hope." Additionally, Mr. Leonard Springs shared inspiring insights with me between sessions. Mr. Spring is described as a true "CEO's CEO" and a monumental figure at the intersection of business and advocacy. Mr. Springs, whose career spanned decades in banking, notably leading supply diversity efforts after the First Union and Wachovia merger, delivered a moving acceptance speech that brought the audience back to his humble roots. Born at the end of a dirt road in Edgefield, South Carolina, Springs shared the wisdom of his grandmother, a domestic worker, who sent him a dollar bill each month for school. Mr. Springs' journey came full circle as he announced that his foundation now provides scholarships to the very high school he was once barred from attending due to segregation. His story serves



as a testament to the power of HB-CUs (he is a proud graduate of Voorhees University) and the necessity of black leadership in finance. Most recently, he played a pivotal role in the 2025 acquisition of Holladay Bank, making it the only minority-owned bank in Utah.

Another major highlight was the strong voice of the future actress and influencer Lynae Vanece. Vanece brought an astute, millennial perspective to the podium as plenary speaker. Lynae Vanece, a poet, social media powerhouse, and NAACP Image Award winner, is also a Spelman alumna with a Master's in African American Studies from Boston University. Lynae challenged the room to move beyond "normalcy" and embrace a "love ethic" in politics. Vanece addressed the current political climate with candor, noting that while economic and environmental challenges feel daunting for 90s babies

and Gen Z, the community's purpose must be radical change rather than a return to a flawed past. Vanece suggested that politicians should focus on "canvassing for community needs, not just votes," meeting tangible needs like opening clinics and food banks before seeking office. Vanece didn't shy away from difficult topics, calling for the healing of "fissures" within the black community, including addressing toxic masculinity and protecting black women.

The luncheon was not just a look back; it was a strategic gathering for the 2026 midterms. Throughout the two-day conference, audience members and speakers alike emphasized several short-term and long-term goals:

Youth Turnout: Combatting disenfranchisement among college voters.
Coalition Building: Strengthening ties between Black and Brown voters to protect congressional districts.

Mental Regulation: Protecting the community's "nervous system" against the stress of systemic injustice.

It was emphasized that the strength of this movement lies in the "merger" of generations, honoring the wisdom of the Leonard Springs while making room for the innovative, unfiltered voices of leaders like Lynae Vanece. We stand in solidarity with these "History Makers" as they continue to turn "what the devil meant for evil" into a collective good for North Carolina and beyond, while we also champion our youth and the leaders of tomorrow.

Amidst the 2026 breakout sessions focusing on the future of energy and technology, a powerful and deeply rooted conversation unfolded on the history and importance of "Black Cooperative Economics." Emphasizing a mission to "acknowledge our ancestors and African origins of community," the session highlighted the critical role that mutual aid and solidarity continue to play in Black self-determination. Other breakout sessions on the "Powering Intelligence: The Promise and Price of AI" and "Every Child, Every County: The Leandro Debate" were informative conversations that left audiences with facts, data, and insight to move forward better and together.

The North Carolina Black Alliance did more than unite us; they reminded us of our impact and importance. NCBA encouraged us to think about our language and messaging, and above all, they gave us a safe space to unpack new and old systems of oppression as we prepare for a brighter and bolder future. Major thanks go out to Courtney Crowder, Executive Director, and Marcus Bass, Incoming Executive Director of The North Carolina Black Alliance. See you next year!



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Community

Fourth Annual Gala: The Daniel Center for Math & Science

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Raleigh, NC - The mission of The Daniel Center for Math and Science (The Daniel Center) is to narrow the education gap for at-risk and disadvantaged children, and the team continues to excel at the mission. Their goal is to prepare and motivate young people to pursue a post-high school education through proven teaching, tutoring, and learning experiences. The Daniel Center hosted its 4th Annual Gala, which was an evening filled with inspiration, celebration, and giving back. Held at the Carolina Exotic Car Club, this momentous occasion brought together

partners, volunteers, and supporters dedicated to bridging the STEM education gap in our community.

The event kicked off with a vibrant meet-and-greet and energetic emcee work from your author, Ms. Jheri Hardaway, a passionate longtime volunteer for The Daniel Center. Laughter and warm conversations filled the automotive venue, creating an atmosphere of shared purpose and connection. Highlights of the evening included a poignant opening address by the organization's leaders, Amani Gordon and Kirby Jones, who emphasized that the Daniel Center's mission is centered around providing a safe haven, quality education, and meaningful opportuni-

ties in science, technology, engineering, and math for children in the community. Their dedication to ensuring all students have the technical background and skills for long-term success resonated throughout the room.

Another impactful point during the celebration was the keynote address by Matt Neal, President of Siemens Energy North America. With his deep-rooted passion for supporting educational equity, Matt shared his powerful insights on the evolving intersection of technology and human potential. In his speech, Matt discussed the immense transformations brought about by Artificial Intelligence, stressing that it should

be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. For Siemens Energy, AI is transforming their business, from changing energy demands to automating specific tasks and augmenting the work they do. He underscored that these technological shifts are leading to new jobs, investments in local community colleges, and technical programs in high schools. However, despite the rapid advancements in AI, Matt reminded everyone that the human aspect, our relationships, and human connection remain increasingly important.

Following the thought-provoking keynote, the evening's fundraising efforts began with an artful live auction. Generous donations of unique items,

including stunning pieces by world-renowned artist Darius Quarles and a Cartier watch, contributed significantly to the cause.

The successful event also recognized the unwavering support of the center's generous sponsors and community partners. Goodwill of Eastern North America was honored as the platinum partner, with Weed Man Lawn Care serving as the gold partner, and Siemens Energy as the silver partner. Additional sponsors and partners include Big Pixel, MG Business Brokers, Vaco, Duke Energy, Dash-C LLC, and English Design and Print, among others.

As the night drew to a close,

Amani Gordon of The Daniel Center shared heartfelt closing remarks, thanking everyone for being a part of their powerful journey. Their dedication to expanding the center and bringing more students into their transformative programs was met with a resounding ovation. The Daniel Center for Math and Science remains committed to its mission, empowering students with knowledge and resources to thrive in an increasingly tech-driven world. Their "Evening of Celebration & Recognition" not only honored their past achievements but also paved the way for a brighter future for the entire community.

Coming Together for the MudGirl Run 2026



By Dominique Heath

Columnist

Thousands gathered in Raleigh for MudGirl Run 2026, an obstacle mud run that has grown from a grassroots empowerment event into an international movement centered on resilience, community, and support.

Founded with the mission of creating an inclusive event focused less on competition and more on personal strength, MudGirl has expanded across multiple cities and countries, drawing participants from all walks of life. What began as a fitness-centered challenge has evolved into something much larger: a space where women, families, friends, survivors, supporters, and entire communities come together to encourage one another through every obstacle.

But what makes MudGirl stand out is that the event is tied to something much deeper than fitness.

Through the Pink Army Foundation, MudGirl has expanded its mission to directly support women battling or recovering from breast cancer. The foundation was created through the collective efforts of the MudGirl community and focuses on helping women regain strength both physically and mentally while surrounded by a support system that understands the journey.

Launched in May 2025, the program is already supporting fighters across the United States and Canada through personalized guidance, community support, and empowerment-based fitness challenges.

One of the foundation's main initiatives is the PATI Program by Compete for a Cure, which provides personalized physical and mental support tailored to women navigating breast cancer recovery and treatment. Beyond that, the organization focuses heavily on community, creating spaces where women can connect with others who under-



stand the emotional and physical realities of the fight.

The foundation also encourages women to challenge themselves physically in ways that help rebuild confidence and remind them of their strength.

Since 2017, MudGirl has contributed more than \$554,000 toward breast cancer causes. Beginning in 2025, a portion of every MudGirl profit, including 50 percent of spectator ticket sales and proceeds from Pink Army T-shirt sales, began going directly toward supporting the Pink Army Foundation.

For many participants in Raleigh, that mission is part of what made the event feel so personal.

Among the crowd were survivors celebrating how far they had come, participants honoring those currently in treatment, and others simply wanting to stand in solidarity with people they care about. Despite the muddy obstacle courses and physical challenges, the atmosphere

throughout the day felt encouraging and supportive, with participants constantly helping and motivating one another along the course.

Also participating was Cary-based gym Aktivite Fitness, a Black and minority-owned boxing and fitness studio known for promoting discipline, confidence, and perseverance through fitness. Representatives and members from the gym took on the woods, mud pits, and obstacle courses alongside hundreds of other runners.

As MudGirl continues to grow globally, events like the Raleigh run show why the movement resonates with so many people. It is not simply about finishing an obstacle course. It is about overcoming challenges together, supporting one another through struggle, and celebrating resilience in all its forms.

For many participants, the mud eventually washes away. The memories, support, and sense of unity do not.



Apex WIN Program Celebrates Leadership, Legacy, and Empowerment—The NAACP Raleigh-Apex Branch proudly hosted its annual Women in the NAACP (WIN) Program today at Martin Street Baptist Church, bringing together community members, elected officials, and supporters to celebrate the strength, leadership, and impact of women in the organization.

A key moment of the event was the crowning of this year's WIN Program winner, Ruth Cooper. In a meaningful and symbolic gesture, the 2024 WIN Program winner, Beverly Gilbert, returned to pass the crown, reinforcing the program's emphasis on mentorship, continuity, and sisterhood within the NAACP.



On Saturday afternoon, around two dozen men attended complimentary prostate cancer screenings organized by the Prostate Health Education Network and the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center at Shaw University. These screenings provided participants with essential health evaluations and a unique chance to consult directly with prostate cancer specialists. Following the assessments, doctors facilitated engaging discussions and responded to questions, creating an encouraging atmosphere for individuals seeking advice and information about prostate cancer detection and care. This initiative underscored the value of early screening and gave attendees the opportunity to expand their knowledge of prostate health through insightful, expert-led conversations. *Mathias Bishop Photos*



SB 214 Threatens Local Government Protections

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

North Carolina Senate Bill 214 (2025-2026 Regular Session) is a complex legislative package that addresses various local government and municipal issues across several counties. While it covers matters like planning, zoning, and annexations, the most significant and controversial provision currently making headlines is Section 5 of the Conference Report. Section 5 authorizes Franklin County to acquire real property (including through condemnation/ eminent domain) in Halifax, Vance, and Warren counties. The bill explicitly states this can be done without the consent or approval of the Board of Commissioners in those neighboring counties. Proponents argue the wording is narrowly tailored to help Franklin County secure water resources, specifically for a raw water transmission line from Kerr Lake to a future treatment facility. Local leaders in Vance, Warren, and Halifax counties have called this provision "unethical" and "fundamentally wrong," comparing it to "robbery" of local control.

As of late April 2026, several county boards and city councils (including

Henderson) have held emergency meetings to pass resolutions officially opposing the bill. The bill has passed both the House and Senate in various forms. Because changes were made, it was sent to a conference committee to resolve differences. This bill is a notable example of the ongoing tension between regional infrastructure needs and local county sovereignty in North Carolina.

The North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP has spoken out strongly against Senate Bill 214, warning that the legislation poses a serious threat to civil rights, local governance, and equitable protections for communities across North Carolina. "Legislators must remove Section V from Senate Bill 214 because it preempts the rights of citizens and the authority of local officials to act in the best interest of the people they serve," said Deborah Dicks Maxwell, President of the North Carolina NAACP. "This provision strips communities of their ability to respond to local needs and undermines fundamental democratic principles."

Another voice speaking out against Section V from SB 214 is the Mayor of the Town of Enfield, W. Mondale Robinson. Mayor Robinson issued

a proclamation which reads in part, "WHEREAS, Franklin County is a majority-white county seeking extraordinary power over land and resources in Halifax County, a majority-Black county with a long and painful history of outside control, economic extraction, and political disregard; and WHEREAS, the optics of a majority-white county attempting to seize authority over the land and resources of a majority-Black county are deeply troubling and echo remnants of an era North Carolina should have left behind long ago; and WHEREAS, our communities have fought too hard for local control, dignity, and economic opportunity to sit silently while another county attempts to legislate away our voice and access to our own future; and WHEREAS, Franklin County's effort to position itself to condemn or acquire property in Halifax County without consent sends a clear and unacceptable message: that the interests of our residents, our municipalities, and our leadership can simply be bypassed; and WHEREAS, despite repeated inquiries, Franklin County officials have refused to provide meaningful explanation, transparency, or justification for why they believe they should be granted this extraordinary

authority over Halifax County; and WHEREAS, Senate Bill 214, Part V, Section 5 represents an egregious abuse of legislative process, an unprecedented assault on local governance, and a direct threat to regional trust, cooperation, and respect; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of Enfield strongly and unequivocally opposes Part V, Section 5 of Senate Bill 214 and rejects any effort by Franklin County to condemn, acquire, or otherwise control land in Halifax County without the consent of Halifax County and its municipalities; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town of Enfield calls upon the North Carolina General Assembly to immediately strike Part V, Section 5 from Senate Bill 214 and reject this shameful overreach."

SB 214 boils down to water rights. Tuesday, April 28, Representative Rodney Pierce held a hearing on the matter. Many citizens were in place to protest including Pamela Ayscue, Marie Smithwick, Robert Snow, Deborah Small, Tykayla Livingston. This potential legislation impacts the Commonwealth of Virginia as well due to shared water basins. The goal is to be fair with resources. The bill was pulled from the calendar today, and many procedural things must happen.

Celebrating The 20th Annual NC Black Summit

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Raleigh, NC - North Carolina Black Alliance is marking its 25th year and just concluded its 20th Annual NC Black Summit, held at the Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley. The event brought together Black elected officials, policy experts, partners, and community advocates to exchange ideas and explore solutions to improve the lives of Black people in North Carolina. The Summit's theme was "Unleashing OUR Power: United in Purpose."

Prominent culture commentators and leading voices from the North Carolina General Assembly led conversations around "Connecting Clergy of Consciousness," a pre-conference session about the intersection of faith and North Carolina politics. Also, "Ballots, Battlegrounds and the Balance of Power," a session



exploring redistricting and voter engagement in North Carolina's shifting political landscape. North Carolina State Senator Kandie Smith was the keynote speaker during the opening breakfast session and participated in a legislative town hall with Black elected officials, including NC State Senate Minority Leader Sydney Batch, Senator Natalie Murdock, NC State House of Representatives Minority Leader Robert Reives, Representative Zack Hawkins, and Representative Rodney Pierce. Topics referenced included energy, education, maternal health, and so much more. Senator Murdock emphasized, "Your zipcode determines if you live or die as a mom." She shared that there are 32 counties with no Obstetrics and Gynecology (OBGYN) in the state of North Carolina. This dangerous fact reinforces the need for conferences like the NC Black Summit that create space for these important conversations.

Gun Control Advocates In NC Work To Keep The Permit Law

NC Newswire—A bill allowing people to carry concealed handguns without permits is dangerous, Durham County Sheriff Clarence Birkhead said Tuesday, as it would increase gun violence and make the jobs of law enforcement officers harder.

Birkhead spoke at a news conference with gun control advocates. They gathered in Raleigh as part of their efforts to convince House members to uphold Gov. Josh Stein's veto of a bill that would make it easier to carry concealed handguns in public.

Under current law, only people 21 and older can carry a concealed weapon, and only after completing an approved firearms safety course and criminal background check.

Under Senate Bill 50, anyone 18 and older who can legally carry a gun could carry it concealed without a permit or safety training.

Birkhead said that would make working in law enforcement more dangerous.

Permitless carry "makes our jobs more difficult - to put a gun in the

(See **GUN CONTROL** P. 9)

Church

A Legacy Ignited: Paneh Conference Concludes Three Days of Worship, Movement, and Testimony in Durham

By Judaea Ingram

Special To The Carolinian

The Paneh Conference concluded its three-day gathering on Saturday, April 25, at Union Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, closing out a weekend shaped by worship, movement, and testimony under the theme “Legacy Ignited.”

Now in its 21st year, the conference carried a strong emphasis on legacy across generations. Leaders pointed repeatedly to the presence of children, youth, and young adults not only as participants, but as the continuation of a ministry many of them were once raised in themselves.

Paneh, which means “in His presence” or “at the face of God,” framed the entire weekend. That meaning was not only explained, but embodied throughout the conference, as worship, teaching, and movement all centered on the idea of living and ministering from that place of presence.

Led by Pastors Timothy and Chandra Midgette, the conference brought together youth, young adults, and adults for three days of prayer, breakout sessions, testimony, and expressive worship. From the opening sessions, the atmosphere carried a sense of expectation, with worship expressed through dance, mime, flag ministry, and Krump.

“We are a family doing ministry together,” Pastor Timothy shared, emphasizing the relational foundation

behind the programming.

That sense of family was visible in the way participants interacted throughout the weekend. Moments of instruction often flowed directly into moments of prayer, laughter, and emotional release. Leaders encouraged attendees to “love on each other, cry a little, then do ministry,” reflecting a rhythm of worship that blended vulnerability with expression.

Worship sessions incorporated multiple forms of ministry, including dance, mime, flag ministry, and Krump. Each expression carried its own emphasis, from storytelling and symbolism in mime and flags, to physical intensity and emotional release in dance and Krump. Together, they created an environment where movement functioned as both worship and communication.

Throughout the conference, each group was not only learning but being actively equipped. Sessions included teaching new songs and movements, and by Saturday night those same groups stepped forward to minister what they had been given. Youth, young adults, and adults all participated, each using their own expression whether through dance, mime, flags, or spoken worship. The emphasis remained on participation rather than performance, with every talent welcomed and used.

That openness reflected a larger truth echoed throughout the weekend. Many of the current leaders of Paneh



once stood in the very same place as the youth now filling the sanctuary. What was visible across the conference was not only instruction, but inheritance. Leaders often reflected on how they had grown up in this same environment, now returning to pour into the next generation.

That investment was evident in the energy of the young people. The youth and young adults were fully engaged throughout the weekend, not simply attending sessions, but actively wanting to be present, to worship, and to be poured into. Their passion shaped the tone of the conference, creating a shared momentum between generations.

Leaders described Paneh not as an event, but as a culture of worship. That culture was built on expression,

discipline, and encounter, but also on something deeper: transformation.

That thread of transformation surfaced again and again through testimony. One testimony recalled by Pastor Timothy centered on a young girl who had not spoken for seven years and communicated only through written notes. He described how she participated in mime during a previous gathering and was later given the opportunity to lead in mime. In the months that followed, he said he would return to the church and find the young girl now ministering through spoken word.

“That testimony is the foundation of what Paneh is about,” he shared, connecting it to the broader mission of the conference as a place where encounter leads to change.

Prayer remained a steady rhythm throughout the weekend, beginning each morning and flowing into breakout sessions where participants learned choreography, movement, and worship expression. Those sessions consistently fed into evening ministry, where learning turned into worship and instruction became experience.

By Saturday, the intensity of the weekend was unmistakable. Leaders, worship leaders, and participants alike were visibly affected, with many leaders losing their voices from continuous praise, shouting, and leading worship across sessions. Even in exhaustion, the momentum did not slow.

One of the most defining moments of the conference was the final day, during the concert came a prolonged praise break led largely by teens and youth. What began as a transition became an extended outpouring of worship, stretching close to 30 minutes. The sanctuary filled with freestyle dance, Krump, prayer, chanting, and spontaneous praise, as young people took ownership of the space in a way leaders described as the essence of Paneh itself.

It was in these moments that the meaning of the conference became most visible. Movement and worship were not separate expressions, but intertwined, reflecting a shared language across generations.

Accessibility also remained central to the vision. Leaders emphasized

that costs were kept low so that participation could remain open, allowing youth and families from different backgrounds to be involved without barriers.

The closing reflections of the conference returned again and again to the idea of legacy. Leaders framed the work of Paneh not only as present worship, but as preparation for the future, where today’s youth would become tomorrow’s leaders.

In its 21st year, the Paneh Conference concluded not as an ending, but as a continuation of something already in motion. What remained was a culture of worship shaped by movement, carried by testimony, and sustained by generations learning, together, what it means to live in His presence, at the face of God.

Church Briefs

The Board of Directors of Capital Area Preservation, Inc. and The Wake County Historic Preservation Commission cordially invite you to join us for our Wake County Preservation Celebration on Sunday, the third of May from three until five o’clock in the afternoon at Good Hope Baptist Church, 4209 Smithfield Rd., Knightdale, NC. RSVP (919) 833-6404.

SERMON of the WEEK



YOU CAN STILL GO UP... EVEN WHEN YOU’VE BEEN PUT DOWN

Text: Luke 18:9-14 (KJV)
Bishop-Elect William “Billy” Eli Ratcliff

The Bible teaches us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. In other words, have confidence—but don’t let confidence turn into conceit. Have assurance—but don’t let assurance turn into arrogance. Have faith—but don’t get so full of yourself that you forget you still need God.

A conceited person has an overly high opinion of themselves. A Pharisee’s spirit is always looking down on somebody else. And the danger is this: you can be in church and still be full of yourself. (Help us all, Lord.) Let me remind you today: No matter how many times you’ve been put down, You Can Still Go Up.

To illustrate this, let’s turn to Luke 18:9-14, where Jesus gives us a powerful picture through a parable about two men—a Pharisee and a publican. He contrasts a self-righteous man with a repentant one.

In this story, we see two men, two confessions, and two outcomes. The Pharisee stood and prayed “with himself.” His prayer sounded religious, but it was really about him: “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men...” Then he listed his works. But the publican stood far off. He wouldn’t lift his eyes, but smote his chest and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And Jesus said that the man went home justified. Because the one who exalts himself shall be brought low, but the one who humbles himself shall be lifted up.

1. YOU CAN BE UP... AND STILL BE WRONG

The Pharisee had position, repu-

tation, and religion—but no real relationship with God. He went up to the temple, but his heart never went up to God. His problem? He talked about somebody instead of talking to the only Somebody who could save him. One man talked about a sinner: the other talked to the Savior. And I don’t know about you, but I’d rather talk to the One who can fix it than talk about the one going through it.

That Pharisee thought he was something special—like a sundae with a cherry on top... maybe even a Bojangles gravy biscuit (and they didn’t even have those back then)! But when he stood before God, what he thought didn’t matter—what God saw did.

Some people today have more mouth than mercy, more criticism than compassion. They can point out everybody else’s faults—but won’t admit what they themselves need to fix.

And here’s the danger: you can be in church and still be full of yourself. You can sing in the choir and still be stuck on you. You can preach, teach, usher, and shout—and still miss God; but here’s more good news:

2. YOU CAN BE PUT DOWN... AND STILL GO UP

Here comes the publican. He didn’t come loud. He didn’t come proud. He came humbly. The Bible says he stood afar off and wouldn’t lift his eyes. That means he knew he needed help. And though his prayer was short, it was powerful: “Lord, have mercy on me.” You don’t need a long speech to reach God—you just need a real heart. When you get honest with God, God will be gracious with you.

Moreover, life can put you down, people can put you down, situations can put you down, even gas prices can put you down! You fill up your tank and say, “Lord, I came to church—now I need help getting back home!” But no matter what pushes you down, if you stay humble, God will lift you up.

The publican didn’t blame anybody. He didn’t compare himself. He didn’t make excuses. He just said, “Lord, it’s me; it’s me, it’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” Not my neighbor; Not my coworker. But it’s me, O Lord! And when you get like that, God will recognize you—no matter

where you’ve been. Even if you’ve been distant...Even if you haven’t been as faithful...Even if you know you need to draw closer... Nevertheless, if you can say, “Lord, have mercy,” God will hear you, and lastly:

3. GOD WILL LIFT YOU WHEN YOU HUMBLE YOURSELF

Jesus said the publican went home justified. That means God made him right—even though he wasn’t perfect. That’s good news because God is forgiving, loving, and merciful. When you are honest with Him, He will hear you. So, stop judging people—and start helping people. God is not pleased with those who point at others, but with those who examine themselves.

I like this story because it shows the power of God. He can take the rejected and restore them, take the one standing afar off and bring them close, and take the one bowed down and lift them up.

Unfortunately, one man thought he didn’t need Jesus, while the other knew he couldn’t make it without Him. One left the same, but the other left changed. I don’t know about you, but I don’t go to church to stay the same. I always come to be changed. How about you?

So don’t worry about people; some have more mouth than mercy and more criticism than compassion. Let them talk about you while you talk to God about you. Don’t focus on others’ bad mouthing—work on yourself.

If life, trouble, and your mistakes bring you down, just remember that when you stay humble, God will lift you up! And when God picks you up, no devil can keep you down. So, lift your head, wipe your tears, and hold on to your faith—God is not finished with you yet. You may have been put, let, or knocked down... But you can still go up! (Now go read what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-11...and hopefully you’ll continue to be blessed by God’s Word.)

To experience the full message, please visit www.youtube.com/@lincolnparkholinesschurch1913 and watch this week’s sermon. We encourage you to Like, Subscribe, and share your thoughts in the comments so we can connect and grow together in faith. We look forward to hearing from you.

Practical Biblical Principles

SATAN SEEKS TO TAKE YOUR FAITH AWAY

Read: Matthew 11:1-19; 12:43-45; 10:16-23; 10:34-39

By: John L. Caldwell, Pastor

New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral

Many Christians are not fully aware of the great spiritual warfare which the devil/anti-Christ brought against the believers, who had been waiting on the Good News of the Gospel, since the prophets of old began to tell of the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah, who is to come and take away the sins of the world. This great spiritual warfare began when it was announced to the world through the Angels, John, the Baptist, and the Prophets of Old (Luke 4:18-21). The devil wasted no time warring to stop the gospel from entering into the world. This was done in an effort to keep all pending believers from receiving the “Good News of the Gospel” which is a message of grace, forgiveness, redemption, and life eternal (John 3:16).

The devil’s “warfare of discouragement” actually started in the Garden with Adam and Eve. However, this warfare became very serious when the Lord was about to enter the human domain by birth. It was the devil who tried to get Mary, the mother of Jesus, stoned to death for being pregnant without being married. For all practical purposes, it was satan who gave the orders to kill all the boy babies two years and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas in order to catch and kill, the heralded new-born king, Jesus, in a dragnet (Matthew 2:16-18). It was at the Mount of Temptation the devil challenged Jesus, the Son of God, as to His allegiance, promising Him the world if He would fall down and worship Him. This temptation took place soon after John had baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, prior to the starting of Jesus’ ministry.

The time came during Jesus’ ministry, when He had to recognize the powerful, unseen spiritual warfare going on against Him and His kingdom work. For His disciple’s sake, Jesus pointed out and warn them of the on-going warfare. Jesus uttered these words warning of “violence” as a response to the Gospel and His

cousin, John the Baptist’s inquisition, who had been arrested and put in prison by King Herod. John sent two of his own disciples to Jesus seeking confirmation whether He, (Jesus) was the Messiah, Who was to come? Jesus recognized that the Old Testament prophecy of His appearance is now complete, and the way is now paved for the Messiah’s entrance into the affairs of men—John’s job is also completed. (Matthew 11:13). Came on, its war time!

Jesus had just finished lauding the great work that John did in preparing the way for His coming (John 11:11). For many who believed in the coming Messiah rushed and flocked to Him when He first appeared and followed Him, heard Him, and were blessed. Then our Lord spoke these words of warning, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it away by force (Matthew 11:12).

What Jesus was referring to in these verses was the opposition He, John and believers of all ages will be facing as they advanced the kingdom of heaven. They will face every type of evil and misunderstanding as they live the Christian life. At times, evil (violence) will interfere and attempt to destroy your faith in God. This “spiritual” warfare will continue until our Lord returns.

In addition to the ugly things satan did, as listed previously in his spiritual warfare against the coming kingdom of God, He also was very angry at John the Baptist for doing such a tremendous job of paving the way for Jesus’ coming. Satan had John’s head cut off while he was in prison (John 14: 8-11). This was done because John confronted King Herod with the truth, that is, he had taken his brother’s wife (Herodias) and lay with her. Celebrating the king’s birthday, with her daughter’s pleasing dance before him and being prompted by her mother, the daughter asked that John’s head be brought to them on a platter and it was done (Matthew 14:4-8). This is a prime example of how violence will interfere with one’s faith with intent of destroying it.

What our Lord was also saying

in addition to the “the kingdom of heavens suffers violence.” Our Lord also suggested that we need to learn how to bring some violence back to the enemy. This is what our Lord meant when He said, “and the violent take it by force.” This means we, as believers, should “go on offence” whenever. However, do not do so without Christ at your side and being in His will (James 4:7). We are not to be afraid to take back from satan.

In Joshua 18, the people had just arrived at the Promised Land and was at the point of dividing their land appointments. Initially God had told the twelve tribes to kill and run everybody out prior to their taking over the land. Of the twelve tribes, only five of them accomplished what God had told them to do. So, there was a hold up in the transition with the other seven tribes. Then God sent Joshua and confronted the scared and hesitant people and encouraged them to get on with God’s land assignment. How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you? Under Joshua’s leadership they pursued and conquered the land. Here they took the land by force under God’s blessing.

Then there was the lady who had suffered for more than 18 years with a bleeding disorder and had spent all of her money with the doctors with no results except she was now broke. Then remembering she was a child of Abraham and of Promise and was one of those believers who was waiting on the Messiah to come (Luke 8:40). The woman then purposed in her mind, if I could just touch the hem of His garment, I will be made whole. (Luke 8:44). We have no idea how long this woman held this kind of faith toward Jesus, but when she got the chance, she went for it and got totally healed. This woman took her faith in hand, ignoring all the social customs for women in public of that day and she pressed her way toward Jesus. She probably had to slap more than a couple of hands, which were trying to hold her back, but persisted in getting to her Lord and was healed. Her violence was insisting on touching Christ and being healed. In short, this means “war.”



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Editorials

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials in this space are the opinion of the newspaper. All other opinion pieces, including those from regular columnists, are the opinion of the writers themselves. The Carolinian strives to provide provocative commentary that is likely to spur thoughtful debate, regardless of whether we agree with it.

“Jones Street”

Redistricting and the Black Community: Lines Still Matter By Val Atkinson

Every ten years, politicians in expensive suits start talking about maps.

They call it redistricting. They speak of percentages, precincts, census blocks, and partisan balance. They present charts, legal arguments, and carefully drawn lines that look harmless on paper.

But let me tell you what many people already know.

Those lines are never just lines.

They are power.

They determine who gets heard, who gets ignored, who gets funded, and who gets left standing outside the room knocking on the door.

For the Black community, redistricting has never been some abstract legal exercise. It has always been about whether our vote can be organized into meaningful representation—or diluted into political decoration.

That is the truth beneath the jargon.

North Carolina knows this history well. There was a time when Black citizens were denied the vote outright through intimidation, literacy tests, poll taxes, and violence. When that era was challenged, new methods emerged. If you could no longer stop people from voting, you could weaken the value of their vote.

Enter the mapmakers.

Sometimes Black voters are “packed” into a small number of districts, giving us overwhelming majorities in a few places while reducing influence everywhere else. Sometimes communities are “cracked,” split across multiple districts so their voice is too scattered to matter. Different methods, same result: less power than the numbers should produce.

The Black community should approach redistricting with clear eyes and long memory.

Representation matters. It matters when drawing legislative districts, congressional seats, county commissions, school boards, and city councils. It matters because policy follows power. Schools, roads, housing, economic development, criminal justice, environmental protection, and public health all trace back to who sits in those chairs making decisions.

Some people say race should no longer be considered. That sounds noble until you remember race has shaped where people live, where resources flowed, and where opportunities were denied for generations. You cannot ignore history and still claim fairness.

At the same time, Black political strength is not measured only by the number of Black elected officials. We need results, not just symbolism. A Black face in office who never fights for Black interests is not progress. Neither is a district designed to look fair while delivering no real influence.

So what should our community demand?

First, transparency. No more back-room mapmaking where the public sees the lines after the deal is done.

Second, community integrity. Keep neighborhoods, counties, and shared interests together whenever possible.

Third, accountability. Any elected official who benefits from Black voters should be expected to deliver for Black communities.

Fourth, participation. Redistricting hearings should not be left to lawyers and insiders. Ministers, educators, business owners, students, retirees, and everyday citizens need to show up and speak up.

And let me add one more truth.

Maps matter, but turnout still matters more.

A fair district means little if people do not vote. A bad district can still be challenged by organized voters. Power never comes from lines alone. It comes from engagement.

Still, do not let anyone fool you into thinking this process is technical and unimportant.

When politicians start drawing maps, they are drawing futures.

The Black community has spent too many years living with lines others drew for us.

It is time we insist on lines that reflect our voice, our numbers, and our right to be taken seriously.

Because in politics, lines still matter.

GUN CONTROL

Continued from page 7

hand of someone who's not trained, who's 18 years of age – so we have to approach every encounter as if there's a weapon, because we just don't know," Birkhead said. "It increases the risk of someone being harmed in that encounter, whether it's the officer, the deputy, or the citizen. That to me is unacceptable."

The North Carolinians Against Gun Violence Education Fund has a list of studies that show firearm homicide rates and suicide rates increased in states that loosened concealed weapon permitting laws or adopted permitless concealed carry, and that rates of officer-involved shootings of civilians increased more than expected in states with permitless concealed carry laws.

The legislature passed the bill last year, and the state Senate has already overridden Stein's veto along party lines. Action now rests in the state House. Both the House and Senate must vote with three-fifths majorities to cancel a veto and make a bill law.

When the House passed the bill last June, two Republicans joined all Democrats in rejecting it. Chances for an override in the House may be in flux as two of three House Democrats who lost their primaries last year have left the party and said they are essentially free agents.

However, one of those former Democrats, Rep. Nasif Majeed of Mecklenburg County, said Tuesday that, at this point, he would continue to oppose permitless concealed carry. "This is going to be coming up, and in all probabilities, I might not see any changes at this time," he said.

Rep. Carla Cunningham of Mecklenburg, who left the Democratic Party last week, would not say Tuesday how she would vote on overrides.

With a veto override, North Carolina would become the 30th state to allow what proponents call “constitutional carry,” NC Newsline has reported.

Sen. Danny Britt (R-Robeson), one of the bill's primary sponsors, and Rep. Keith Kidwell (R-Beaufort), a vocal House supporter, did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

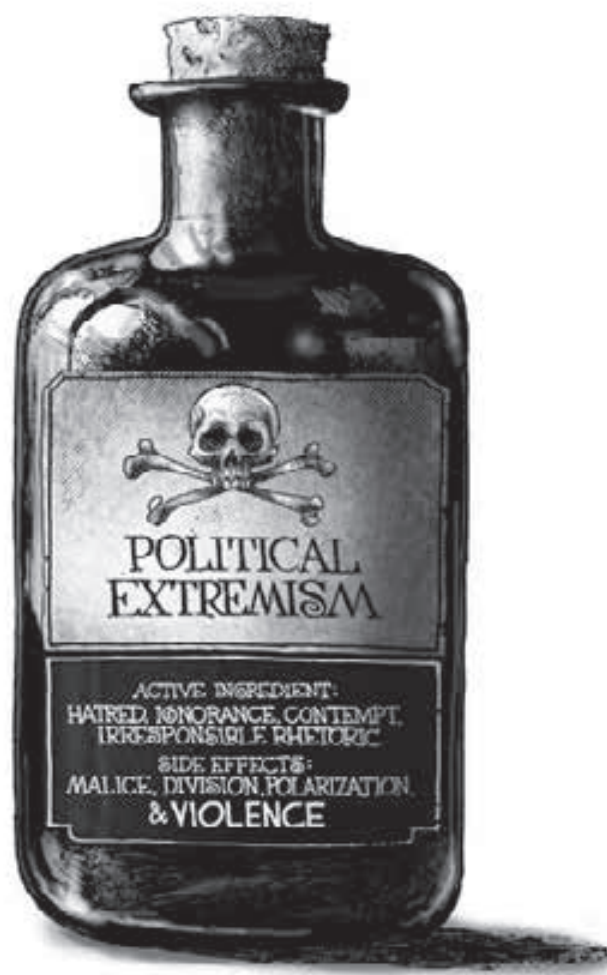
But speaking for the bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee last year, Britt said, “We believe that our constitution is clear that law-abiding citizens should be allowed to constitutionally carry. We believe they should be able to constitutionally carry without having to jump through the hoops that you do for a concealed carry permit.”

At Tuesday's news conference, Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action, said allowing teenagers to carry hidden weapons is “shameful.”

Requiring concealed weapons permits is “common sense,” she said.

“Our lives are at risk,” she said. “Other states that have eliminated concealed carry permits have seen 27% increases in gun homicides. We can't let that happen here, too.”

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CONSEQUENCES

I've lived in North Carolina long enough to see good years, lean years, and years when our leaders in Raleigh couldn't agree on much of anything. But I'll tell you this: I have never seen anything quite like what we're living through now. A state budget that was supposed to be finished last July 1 is still sitting somewhere between the House and the Senate, collecting dust while the rest of us deal with the consequences.

And make no mistake—there are consequences. When a state goes this long without a budget, it's not just a political disagreement. It's a message about priorities. And for many of us, especially seniors and especially African American seniors, the message feels loud and clear: we're not at the top of the list.

Let's start with education. I may be a grandmother, but I still care deeply about the schools that shaped my children and grandchildren. Teachers in North Carolina haven't seen meaningful raises in years, and because of this budget stalemate, they're stuck again—no raises, no new classroom support, no relief from buying supplies out of their own pockets. I've read stories of teachers spending more than \$1,600 a year on basic materials. That's not a system; that's a charity drive.

And then there's Medicaid. More than 3 million North Carolinians rely on it, including many seniors and caregivers. Because the legislature hasn't passed a budget, the state can't properly fund the Medicaid “rebase”—the adjustment needed to keep the program afloat. Health officials have warned that without it, they may have to cut payments to doctors and hospitals. Rural hospitals, which already operate on thin margins, are especially vulnerable. For communities like ours, where chronic conditions are more common and access to care is already uneven, this is not an abstract policy issue. It's life and death. I am not a conspiracy theorist, but this feels like passive genocide.

State agencies are feeling the strain too. The Secretary of State's office says its workload has doubled since 2017, but they can't hire the staff they need. Other departments are delaying projects, freezing positions, and stretching their people to the breaking point. Even the state zoo has reported difficulty paying bills. When the zoo is struggling, you know the situation has gone from unusual to downright embarrassing.

There was a time when political disagreements stayed in the political arena. But today, the ripple effects reach all of us. And as we head toward November, people across the state—Democrats, Republicans, and independents—are asking the same question: how did we get here?

Some analysts say the budget stalemate is a symptom of deeper divisions within the legislature itself. Others point to disagreements over Medicaid funding, tax cuts, and spending priorities. Whatever the cause, the result is the same: a government that isn't functioning the way it should.

And that brings us to the election. I'm not here to tell anyone how to vote. But I will say this: many observers have noted that the frustration over this budget impasse could influence the balance of power in Raleigh. Some political writers have suggested that if voters—especially seniors—feel ignored or taken for granted, they may be more open to shifting control of the legislature. Others have pointed out that close districts could swing if enough people decide they want a different approach to governing.

Again, I'm not predicting anything. Elections are decided by the people who show up. But I do believe this: when leaders fail to pass a budget for more than 200 days, people notice. Seniors notice. Families notice. Teachers notice. And voters—especially those of us who have lived long enough to recognize patterns—remember.

Again, it begs the question: how did we get here? Truth is, this can only happen because those who control the money believe we, the voters, can't or won't connect the dots. Our apathy, lack of understanding, or distraction has turned these most important jobs into popularity contests with incumbents exhibiting an intense sense of entitlement to their offices.

As November approaches, I'm watching who shows up for us, who listens, and most importantly who acts, and who delays. A budget isn't just a stack of numbers—it's a statement of values. And after all these months without one, I'm ready to hear what the people of North Carolina have to say in return.



WHAT REALLY IS THE QUESTION

This may sound a little or a lot different, but do we ask ourselves the right questions on our journey toward belief? Do we really believe what we say we believe?

For example, do we really believe that Jesus was and is a good model for our lives? Do we really believe that we were created by God and put here for a purpose? And despite all the craziness that comes into our lives, do we believe there are some things we simply cannot control and some things we should not even want to?

I absolutely believe Jesus was a good teacher and model. When I read the Bible, I see somebody who stayed in his own lane while ful-

filling his purpose. He trusted God completely. He did not spend all his time trying to control everybody else. He taught, loved, healed, listened, and checked in with God constantly.

What prompted all this for me was a few things.

First, it is cold in April, and the weather just feels different now. I remember when you could count on the seasons. Then I read reports about swarms of bees settling over northern Israel. Immediately, I thought about the plagues in Egypt and how those were signs meant to get Pharaoh's attention and force him to change.

So I started wondering. Is anybody besides me considering whether these things might mean something? Especially at a time when people are fighting over land, power, and who has the right to exist somewhere?

Then I watched Bill Maher talking about how long Jewish people have lived in Israel, and I found myself asking questions. No one family or one group can literally have occupied the same land forever without history being more complicated than that. And who was already there? Who sold land to whom? Who decided one group mattered more than another?

Of course, these are difficult conversations. But almost every religion teaches some version of treating others the way you want to be treated. Most holy books say things like “Do not repay evil for evil” and “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.”

So why do people quote scripture when it supports power but ignore it when it calls for mercy, humility, and compassion?

Why do some people think they need to help God accomplish His plans through domination and exclusion?

And then there was the discussion Michelle Obama had about her hair. As usual, she handled herself beautifully. She explained that while she was First Lady, she made certain choices about her hair simply to avoid unnecessary controversy.

But the question I kept thinking was: why is her hair anybody else's business?

Seriously. What makes people think a Black woman in the White House has to wear her hair a certain way to make other people comfortable? And if she straightens it, curls it, braids it, or wears it naturally, why does anybody care?

Where is God in that thinking?

If people believe God created us, then why are they so determined to criticize the way His creations look? What exactly are they trying to control?

Michelle finally laughed and basically said, “Please stop asking me about my hair. And no, you cannot touch it.”

Honestly, I understood exactly what she meant.

I think questions matter. The right questions make us think. Sometimes they even lead us toward truth if we are willing to sit with them long enough.

The Bible itself is full of questions.

“Where are your clothes?”

“Where were you when I created the world?”

“Who is my mother and my family except those who do the will of God?”

“Didn't you know I must be about my Father's business?”

“Where are your accusers?”

Questions have a way of making us stop and look at ourselves. Maybe that is the point.

ANDREW BROWN JR.'S DEATH 5 YEARS LATER

Continued from page 1

“You have somebody in the car and they're scared,” he said. “They have a way to get away, so naturally, they're gonna drive away. And then you have this officer that's really not in danger of being run over.”

Pasquotank NAACP president Keith Rivers, brother of Mayor Kirk Rivers, says the open wound in the city never really closed. “Things seem not to go away,” Rivers said. “That creates apathy.”

The NAACP previously called for the resignation of Pasquotank's sheriff.

Womble, the former district attorney of Pasquotank's prosecutorial district, was elected Superior Court Judge for District 1 a year after Brown was killed.

Sheriff Wooten was re-elected after winning the Republican primary race for sheriff this year.

The day after his win, Wooten fired four of his employees, including an officer who ran against him, and Maj. Aaron Wallio, who was the sheriff's liaison to the Citizens' Advisory Council, according to reporting by local newspaper The Daily Advance.

“When the community looks back and it's still the same people in the same places, that's what takes away hope,” Rivers said.

The work ahead

Pasquotank native Ashley Mitchell, attorney for social justice think tank Forward Justice and chair of the Citizens' Advisory Council, says the council's work is an effective bridge between the Sheriff's Office and the people of the county.

But, she says, their work is still cut out for them, and they need more from the Sheriff's Office.

“There have been efforts, don't get me wrong,” said Mitchell in an interview. “The forming of the CAC is definitely an effort. The sheriff creating some community programs and trying to be more visible. But unless you're really touching the people, the ones who are truly impacted, and listening to them, you're not really fixing that issue of harm in the community.”

Increasing public awareness and visibility for the council is still an ongoing challenge, due to Elizabeth City's unique culture and demographics as a rural city, Mitchell said.

In the wake of Brown's death, Pasquotank County Commissioners contracted with Police2Peace, a nonprofit that studies how to improve law enforcement community relations.

Following months of meetings and community listening sessions, Police2Peace released the “Pasquotank Peace Initiative” report in 2022.

The plan recommends enhanced de-escalation training for officers and much more engagement with residents.

In a regular meeting this week, Pasquotank County commissioners agreed to a request by the NAACP to revisit the plan and assess the county's progress on those goals.

Classifieds

CHATHAM COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA
CHATHAM COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION In the General Court of Justice District Court Division File No: 26CV000382-180

To: JOSE IGNACIO CORTEZ-LOPEZ, Defendant.

Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed. The nature of the relief being sought is for child custody. You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than May 27, 2026 said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, ADAMILDA GELINDA ESCALANTE-ESCOBAR, will apply to the court located at 40 E Chatham St, Pittsboro, NC 27312 for the relief sought.

This, the 16th day of April 2026.

Aneta Pavla
Pavla Law Offices, PLLC
Telephone: (919) 410-6690
4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026

DURHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000301-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JANICE ELAINE BURGESS, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 31, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of April, 2026.
Ronchadd Jarvell Wilkins, Executor
3007 Petty Road Unit 104
Durham, NC 27707

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000141-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of DEBORAH H. JOLLY, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 31, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of April, 2026.
Syreeta Jolly, Executor
904 Arnette Ave.
Durham, NC 27701

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No: 26E000275-310

Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of DEBORAH G. BROGDEN, deceased, of 610 Trent Dr., Apt. # 306, Durham County, Durham, NC 27705, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before July 31, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of April, 2026.
Heather B. Brooks
Executor of the Estate of Deborah G. Brogden
c/o Jeffrey L. Austin
Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin, PLLC
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division

File No: 26E0004369-310

Los Primos Auto Repair LLC,
Plaintiff v. John Doe, Defendant
TO: John Do TAKE NOTICE

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000482-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JULIA KING ALLEN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 31, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of April, 2026.
Jonathan Gray Wilson, Executor
317 Monticello Ave.
Durham, NC 27707

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The undersigned, having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of LARRY WOODSON APPLE, Deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate to exhibit the same on or before July 30, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026
Dated April 30, 2026.

Wynolia Catherine Apple, Administrator
c/o Attorney Heather Hazelwood
PO Box 61182
Durham NC 27715

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The undersigned, having qualified as Executor of the Estate of BRUCE ALAN SCOTLAND, Deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate to exhibit the same on or before July 30, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

Dated April 30, 2026.
Paula A. Scotland, Executor
c/o Attorney Heather Hazelwood
PO Box 61182
Durham NC 27715

4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 17th day of April 2026, as Executor of the ESTATE OF GEORGE THOMAS ARNOLD MORRIS, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 31st day of July 2026 or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of April 2026.
GEORGE THOMAS MORRIS
EXECUTOR

ESTATE OF GEORGE THOMAS ARNOLD MORRIS
c/o E. J. Walker, Jr., Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717
4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000443-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of RUFUS KENNY HEADING, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 31, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of April, 2026.
Carolyn James Wheeler a/k/a Sue Wheeler c/o Law Office of Anne Page Watson PLLC
3400 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 205
Durham, NC 27705
4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

SMALL CLAIMS

In The General Court of Justice,
District Court Division

FILE NO: 26CV004369-310
Los Primos Auto Repair LLC,
Plaintiff v. John Doe, Defendant
TO: John Do TAKE NOTICE

that a Small Claims action has been filed against you by Los Primos Auto Repair LLC regarding a motor vehicle left for repairs and not claimed. You are required to appear before a Magistrate in Durham County as follows: Date: Thursday, June 4, 2026 Time: 2:00 PM Location: 3rd Floor Magistrates Durham County Courthouse 510 S. Dillard Street Durham, North Carolina If you fail to appear and defend against the claim, judgment may be entered against you. This the 23rd day of April 2026. Los Primos Auto Repair LLC 3433 Angier Ave Durham, NC 27703 (919) 7581899 Harriett70@hotmail.com 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having qualified as Executor of the Estate of RICHARD ROBERT HOFFMAN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned on or before July 23, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, or corporations indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026
Jillian Orans
Executor of the Estate of Richard Robert Hoffman

c/o Jillian E. Brevorka, Esq.
Attorney for the Estate
Hodgson Russ LLP
7 Corporate Center Court
Suite B
Greensboro, NC 27408

4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000443-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of RUFUS KENNY HEADING, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 24, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026.
Carolyn James Wheeler a/k/a Sue Wheeler c/o Law Office of Anne Page Watson PLLC
3400 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 205
Durham, NC 27705

4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 13th day of April, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of WALKER WAYNE GUTHRIE, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of July or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the April 23, 2026.

Rupinder Singh Gill
EXECUTOR
ESTATE OF Walker Wayne Guthrie
c/o Rupinder Singh Gill, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717
4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000430-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of EMMANUEL KWAME GBEDEE, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 24, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026.
Eneye Gloria Gbedee, Administrator
1405 Cozart Street
Durham, NC 27704
4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000418-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CARL MICHAEL FUQUAY, SR., deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 26, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026.
Lakesha Berting Royster
Administrator
823 N. Mangum St. Apt. 521
Durham, NC 27701

4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF LINDA SAAREMAA

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Linda Saaremaa, late of Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit them to William R. Loeser as Executor of the decedent's estate on or before July 25, 2026 c/o Melissa Parthemore, Attorney at Law, 1414 Raleigh Rd., Ste. 203, Chapel Hill, NC 27517, or be barred from their recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment to the above-named Executor.

This the 23rd day of April 2026.
William R. Loeser, Executor
c/o Melissa Parthemore, Atty.
TrustCounsel

1414 Raleigh Rd., Ste. 203
Chapel Hill, NC 27517

4/23, 4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000324-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JENNIFER RENEE BENNETT A.K.A. JENNY BENNETT, A.K.A. JENNIFER BENNETT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 17, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Thomas Lee Bennett III
C/O The Monroe Law Firm
1340 Environ Way
Chapel Hill, NC 27517

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 25E000182-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JACQUELINE THORPE BRIGHT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 17, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Jamal Edward Thompson
Administrator
825 Gerard St.
Durham, NC 27701

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of LOUISE OLIVER MATTHEWS of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 18th day of July, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026
Michael J. Quinlivan
Executor of the Estate of Janet M. Quinlivan
c/o Jillian E. Brevorka, Esq.
Attorney for the Estate
Hodgson Russ LLP
7 Corporate Center Court
Suite B
Greensboro, NC 27408

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having qualified as Executor of the Estate of JANET M. QUINLIVAN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned, on or before July 16, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, or corporations indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026
Michael J. Quinlivan
Executor of the Estate of Janet M. Quinlivan
c/o Jillian E. Brevorka, Esq.
Attorney for the Estate
Hodgson Russ LLP
7 Corporate Center Court
Suite B
Greensboro, NC 27408

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against RONALD COOPER, DECEASED, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before July 15, 2026, or this notice along with

This is the 16th day of April, 2026.

Rhonda Matthews Price & Renee Jill Matthews Barber, Co-Executrices, c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr., Stubbs Cole Law Firm, 4 Consultant Place, Durham, NC 27707

H-S: 4-16, 4-23, 4-30 & 5-7-2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 25E000708-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MAX PAUL ROUSSEAU A/K/A/ MAXENT PAUL ROUSSEAU, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 17, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Felicia M. Rousseau, Executor
8 Lauren Ln.
Durham, NC 27704

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000379-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CAROLYN F. BOLDEN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 17, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Lesley Bolden, Administrator
5305 Lacy Rd.
Durham, NC 27713

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000368-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JOHNETTA HODGES, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 17, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Aisa Yarborough, Administrator
c/o Christopher Hill
311 E. Main street
Durham, NC, 27701

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having qualified as Executor of the Estate of JANET M. QUINLIVAN, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned, on or before July 16, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, or corporations indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Michael J. Quinlivan
Executor of the Estate of Janet M. Quinlivan
c/o Jillian E. Brevorka, Esq.
Attorney for the Estate
Hodgson Russ LLP
7 Corporate Center Court
Suite B
Greensboro, NC 27408

4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File No.: 26E000408-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ESTHER BARNETT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 10, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Tabatha Hart Allen, Administrator
11 Mattie CT
Durham, NC 27704

4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

DURHAM COUNTY

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Robert E. Levin
Public Administrator of the Estate of Cheri W. Fuller
HAYWOOD, DENNY & MILLER, L.L.P.
Attorneys at Law
P.O. Box 51429
Durham, NC 27717
(919) 403-0000
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 18-E-1017

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CHERI W. FULLER, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 10, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Roberts E. Levin, Administrator
PO Box 51429
Durham, NC 27717
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified as the Personal Representative of the Estate of SYLVESTER ROSS, late of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate, Kim K. Steffan, Steffan & Associates, P.C., 2411 Old NC 86, Hillsborough, NC 27278, on or before the 9th day of July, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

Chester Ross
Personal Representative
Attorney for Estate:
Kim K. Steffan
Steffan & Associates, P.C.
2411 Old NC 86
Hillsborough, NC 27278
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 25E001024-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of OMAR BASHIR TARIQ, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 10, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Sally Ann Tariq, Administrator
1304 Buffalo Road
Garner, NC 27529
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E000120-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of KRISTIN ABERLE, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 10, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Kaitlyn Aberle, Administrator
4290 Brighton Blvd #708
Denver, CO 80216
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified before the Clerk of Superior Court of Durham County as Public Administrator of the Estate of DERAL WEST HAMILTON, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate

to send them, duly itemized and verified, to P.O. Box 51429, Durham, NC 27717, on or before the 9th day of July, 2026, (three months after the date of this Notice) or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the Estate are requested to make prompt settlement with the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Robert E. Levin
Public Administrator of the Estate of DERAL WEST HAMILTON, Deceased P.O. Box 51429
Durham, NC 27717
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E000377-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of PAMELA LOVATE BASNIGHT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate to present them to the undersigned, in writing, at the address shown below, on or before July 10, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the decedent or the Estate are requested to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 9th day of April, 2026.
Ashia Joell Basnight, Executor
108 Geranium Street
Durham, NC 27704
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

DISTRICT COURT
CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA
Case No. A-21-840173-C
Department No. 8
COAST HOTELS AND CASINOS, INC., dba THE ORLEANS HOTEL AND CASINO, a Nevada Corporation vs. MICHAEL BURG
CIVIL SUMMONS
NOTICE!

YOU HAVE BEEN SUED. THE COURT MAY DECIDE AGAINST YOU WITHOUT YOUR BEING HEARD UNLESS YOU FILE A RESPONSE WITH THE COURT WITHIN 21DAYS. READ THE INFORMATION BELOW CAREFULLY.

To the Defendant(s) named above:

A civil complaint has been filed by the Plaintiff(s) against you. Plaintiff(s) is seeking to recover the relief requested in the complaint, which could include a money judgment against you or some other form of relief.

The Complaint alleges that you failed to pay sums due and owning under an Arena Services Agreement dated July 26, 2023 and has alleged causes of action for Breach of Contract, Breach of the Covenant of Good Faith and Fair Dealing, and Unjust Enrichment.

If you intend to defend this lawsuit, within 21 days after this Summons is served on you (not counting the day of service), you must:

1. File with the Clerk of the Court, whose address is shown below, a formal response (typically a legal document called an "answer," but potentially some other response) to Plaintiff's complaint.

Regional Justice Center
200 Lewis Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada 89155

2. Pay the required filing fee to the court, or file an Application to Proceed In Forma Pauperis and request a waiver of the filing fee.

3. Serve (by mail or hand delivery) a copy of your response upon the Plaintiff whose name and address is shown below.

If you fail to respond, the Plaintiff can then enter judgment against you for the relief demanded by the Plaintiff in the complaint, which could result in money or property being taken from you or some other relief requested in Plaintiff's complaint. If you intend to seek an attorney's advice, do it quickly so that your response can be filed on time.
4/30, 5/7, and 5/14/2026

ORANGE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE OF ACTION FOR PUBLICATION
In The Circuit Court Of The Eighteenth Judicial Circuit
In And For Brevard County, Florida
In Re: Termination Of Parental Rights For The Proposed Adoption Of The Minor Child: Milanee Mona Bell, Dob: 07/26/2008

Having qualified as the Personal Representative of the Estate of STEVEN ROBERT DUKE, late of Wake County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate,
Sonya S. Linton, Magnolia Legal, 3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120, Durham, NC 27707, on or before the 29th day of July 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said

CASE NO.: 05-2025-DR-037416-XXDR-BC, DIVISION: F
GEORGE BELL, Petitioner
TO: Gail Villanueva
Address: 447 Ballantyne Common Circle, Apartment 103, Hendersonville, North Carolina 28792

YOU ARE NOTIFIED that an action for the proposed adoption, including a claim for termination of parental rights, has been filed against you. You are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to this action on Jessica D. Thomas, Attorney for Petitioner, GEORGE BELL, whose address is 253 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 204, Maitland, FL 32751, on or before March 11, 2026, and file the original with the Clerk of this Court at 425 N. Orange Avenue, Orlando, Florida 32801, either before service on Petitioner's attorney or immediately thereafter; otherwise, a default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the Petition.

WARNING: Rule 12.285, Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure, requires certain automatic disclosure of documents and information. Failure to comply can result in sanctions, including dismissal or striking of pleadings.

DATED this 20th day of February, 2026.

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
By: Debbie Huff
Deputy Clerk
Published: 3/26, 4/2, 4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026

ON SLOW COUNTY

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME

Case No. 26STCP00773
To All Interested Persons:
Mauro Pasillas Macias, filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:

PRESENT NAME
Mauro Pasillas Macias
PROPOSED NAME
Mauro Pasillas

THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.

Notice of Hearing
Date: 06/26/2026 Time: 8:30 AM Dept.: 45; Room 529
The address of the court is 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, California 90012. *To appear remotely, check in advance of the hearing for information about how to do so on the court's website. To find your court's website, go to www.courts.ca.gov/find-my-court.htm.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you or your witnesses, do not have the ability to access the court's website above, or are unable to follow the instructions on the Court's website, or are otherwise unable to appear remotely, you MUST call the court room or call 213-633-0645, prior to the hearing, to request an alternate means to appear. Failure to do so may result in your case being dismissed, or a ruling issued against you. The address of the court is 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, California 90012. A copy of this Order to Show Cause shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation printed in the county which Mauro Pasillas Macias resides:
Date: 02/24/2026
Judge Virginia Keeny, Judge of the Superior Court
4/9, 4/16, 4/23, and 4/30/2026

WAKE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as the Personal Representative of the Estate of Sonya S. Linton, Magnolia Legal, 3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120, Durham, NC 27707, on or before the 29th day of July 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said

estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
Thea Marie Craft
Personal Representative
File #: 26E001320-910
Attorney for Estate:
Sonya S. Linton
Magnolia Legal
3001 Academy Rd., Suite 120
Durham, NC 27707
4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026.
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE OF BONNIE LYNNE WHEATLEY
FILE NO 24E003243-910

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against BONNIE LYNNE WHEATLEY, deceased, of Wake County, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before July 31, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 30th day of April, 2026. Emily Griffith, Administrator CTA, c/o Blue LLP, 205 Fayetteville St, Suite 300, Raleigh, NC 27601. The Carolinian, 4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
File No. 22CVD014078-910

MELONIE E. JEFFERYS, Plaintiff
v. OSCAR O. OGBUNAH, Defendant

TO: OSCAR O. OGBUNAH
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is Absolute Divorce.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days from the date of first publication of this notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 23rd day of April, 2026.
Melonie E. Jefferys, Plaintiff
8337 Wynnewood Court
Raleigh, NC 27616
4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No.: 26E000830-910

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of EMILY BRINKLEY, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned at the address shown below on or before the date which is three (3) months from the date of first publication of this notice, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 16th day of April, 2026.
Myca Adams, Administrator
Estate of Emily Brinkley
201 Citrine Ct
Knightdale, NC 27545
4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned having qualified as Limited Personal Representative of the Estate of SANDRA KAY TSCHOPP, Deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the Estate to Exhibit them to the undersigned at the office of IDOL LAW, PLLC, PO Box 51759, Durham, North Carolina 27717, on or before the 19th day of July, 2026, or this Notice will be in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment.

This is the 16th day of April, 2026.
Tony T. Tschopp, Limited Personal Representative
Estate of Sandra Kay Tschopp, Deceased
Robert A. Idol, Esquire
IDOL LAW, PLLC
Attorney at Law
PO Box 51759
Durham, NC 27717
(919)401.5151
4/16, 4/23, 4/30, and 5/7/2026

FORECLOSURE

NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE
Special Proceedings
No. 26SP000131-310
Substitute Trustee: Philip A. Glass
Date of Sale: May 6, 2026
Time of Sale: 2:30 p.m.
Place of Sale:
Durham County Courthouse
Description of Property:
See Attached Description
Record Owners: Jose Tehandon Juarez and Lazara Diaz
Address of Property:
102 Citrine Ct.
Durham, NC 27703

Deed of Trust:
Book #: 8837 Page: 674
Dated: December 30, 2019
Grantors: Jose Tehandon Juarez and Lazara Diaz
Original Beneficiary: State Employees' Credit Union
CONDITIONS OF SALE:

This sale is made subject to all unpaid taxes and superior liens or encumbrances of record and assessments, if any, against the said property, and any recorded leases. This sale is also subject to any applicable county land transfer tax, and the successful third party bidder shall be required to make payment for any such county land transfer tax. It is the intent of the holder of the above Deed of Trust that the execution, delivery and recordation of a Trustee Deed to the holder as high bidder shall not merge with any superior Deeds of Trust held by the holder of the above Deed of Trust, and that the holder of said superior Deed of Trust shall continue to enjoy all rights and remedies set forth in said superior Deed of Trust, including the right to foreclose either by judicial action or under power of sale contained in the superior Deed of Trust.

The property to be offered pursuant to this Notice of Sale is being offered for sale "AS IS, WHERE IS." THERE ARE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES relating to the title or to any physical, environmental, health or safety conditions existing in, on, at or relating to the property being offered for sale, and any and all responsibilities or liabilities arising out of or in any way relating to any such condition are expressly disclaimed.

A cash deposit of 5% of the purchase price will be required at the time of the sale. Remote bidding will not be accepted pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes Section 45-21.25 (a). Credit bids on behalf of the Noteholder will be accepted. Any successful bidder shall be required to tender the full balance of the purchase price so bid in cash or certified check at the time the Substitute

Trustee tenders to him a deed for the property or attempts to tender such deed, and should said successful bidder fail to pay the full balance purchase price so bid at that time, he shall remain liable on his bid as provided for in North Carolina General Statutes Section 45-21.30 (d) and (e). This sale will be held open ten (10) days for upset bids as required by law.

Residential real property with less than 15 rental units, including single-family residential real property: an order for possession of the property may be issued pursuant to G.S. 45-21.29 in favor of the purchaser and against the party or parties in possession by the clerk of superior court of the county in which the property is sold. Any person who occupies the property pursuant to a rental agreement entered into or renewed on or after October 1, 2007, may, after receiving notice of sale, terminate the rental agreement by providing written notice of termination to the landlord, to be effective on a date stated in the notice that is at least 10 days, but not more than 90 days, after the sale date contained in the notice of sale, provided that the mortgagor has not cured the default at the time the tenant provides the notice of termination. Upon termination of a rental agreement, the tenant is liable for rent due under the rental agreement prorated to the effective date of the termination.

Dated: 4/8/26
Philip A. Glass, Substitute Trustee
Nodell, Glass & Haskell, L.L.P.
Posted on 4/8/26

Exhibit A
BEING all of Lot 141, Stonehill Estates Subdivision. Phase 4, Plat Book 174, Page 377-380, Durham County.

Subject to easements, restrictions and rights of way of record, and utility lines and rights of way in existence over, under or upon the above-described property. PIN: 0851-14-9033
Property Address: 102 Citrine Ct. Durham, NC 27703
4/23 and 4/30/2026

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA
IN RE: TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS FOR THE PROPOSED ADOPTION
CASE NO.: 05-2025-DR-037416-XXDR-BC
THE MINOR CHILD: DIVISION: F
MILANEE MONA BELL
DOB: 07/26/2008
GEORGE BELL
Petitioner

NOTICE OF HEARING TO TERMINATE PARENTAL RIGHTS AND FINAL ADOPTION HEARING

TO: Gail Villanueva: Last Known Address: 447 Ballantyne Common Circle, Apt 103, Hendersonville, NC 28792
Physical Description:

- Height: 5'9"
- Brown hair
- Brown eyes
- Approx. 200 lbs
- Children: Milanée Mona Bell (DOB: 07/26/2008)
- Place of Birth: Holmes Regional Medical Center, Melbourne, Brevard County

A Petition to Terminate Parental Rights And Petition for Adoption was filed on 10/22/25. You are being served with a copy of the petition along with this notice. A hearing on the petition will take place on May 22, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., presided over by Honorable Judge Dookhoo, via remote proceedings. The court has allocated 15 minutes for this hearing.

You are hereby notified that an action has been filed seeking the termination of parental rights to Milanée Mona Bell (DOB: 07/26/2008) pending their adoption.

You are required to serve written defenses to the petition upon the attorney for the petitioner, whose name and address are provided in the petition, and to file the original written defenses with the Clerk of the Circuit Court at the address P.O. BOX 219 TITUSVILLE, FL 32781-0219 no later than 20 days after the date of service of this notice.

If you fail to serve written defenses and file them with the Clerk within the specified time, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition, which may include termination of parental rights concerning Milanée Mona Bell (DOB: 07/26/2008) pending their adoption. Court documents and information regarding this case are available for your review at the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court. If you wish to access or obtain copies of these documents, you may contact the Clerk's office directly.

You are required to keep the Clerk of the Circuit Court informed of your current address at all times. Future papers and notices in this proceeding will be mailed to the address on file with the Clerk. WARNING: Rule 12.285, Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure, requires certain automatic disclosure of documents and information. Failure to comply with Rule 12.285 may result in sanctions, including dismissal of pleadings, striking of claims or defenses, or other penalties as determined by the court.

Judge Dookhoo
<https://f118.org/judgedookhoo>



PURSUANT TO SECTION 63.089, FLORIDA STATUTES, FAILURE TO SUBMIT A WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THIS NOTICE AND THE PETITION IN A TIMELY MANNER, AS WELL AS FAILURE TO APPEAR AT THE SCHEDULED HEARING, MAY RESULT IN THE COURT TERMINATING ANY PARENTAL RIGHTS YOU HOLD OR CLAIM CONCERNING THE MINOR CHILD.
DATED this 24th day of April 2026.
RACHEL M. SADOFF, CFCC
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
4/30, 5/7, 5/14, and 5/21/2026

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Sports

Kenya's Sabastian Sawe Breaks The Two-Hour Barrier

By Simon D. Angus

Monash Business School

Well, well. Kenyan marathon runner Sabastian Sawe has officially broken through the fabled "sub-2-hour" marathon barrier.

On a reportedly perfect Sunday, 26 April 2026 in London, the 31-year-old Sawe ran through the finish gate on the Mall in front of Buckingham Palace's gilded architectural flourishes in an official marathon time of 1 hour 59 minutes and 30 seconds.

This better the marathon world record by a whopping 65 seconds, the largest single improvement since 2018. The previous world record was held by the late Kelvin Kiptum, also of Kenya. Kiptum's 2 hours and 35 seconds, set in Chicago in 2023, now somehow seems an entire era away.

In fact, saying Sawe broke 2 hours is something of an understatement.



Such was the brilliance of the moment, that Sawe pushed the second-placed Yomif Kejelcha of Ethiopia below the sub-2-hour mark as well, just 11 seconds behind Sawe.

But as we absorb all of this, it's

hard not to wonder, "What next?"

My interest as a data scientist and economist (and fellow runner) lies in analysing the historical progression of the men's and women's world marathon records.

If sub-2 was the driving force behind the marathon in the last decade, what's left to aim for?

Humanity seems obsessed with the limits of human creativity, ingenuity and performance. We award extravagant prizes for world firsts and remember the greatest achievements through bronze statues in prominent squares the world over.

But can we actually calculate these limits? Is there a "maths" of human endeavour?

Back in 2018, the legendary Eliud Kipchoge of Kenya ran 2 hours 1 minute and 9 seconds in the official Berlin Marathon. At the time, many dared to dream Kipchoge could be the one to take the men's marathon below 2 hours.

In fact, a year later, Kipchoge appeared to do just that – running a phenomenal 1 hour 59 minutes and 40 seconds in a tightly orchestrated

"breaking 2" display in Vienna.

However awe-inspiring, the Vienna effort would never make it into the official marathon books. The run was contrived in a number of ways, fully understood and acknowledged by Kipchoge and the organisation around him. This was never about the record, but instead, it was, he said, about proving that limits are there to be broken.

Around the same time, I had been working on a statistical approach to

modelling the progression of marathon world records over the last few decades. I was intrigued to apply learnings from technological change in economics to the question of human performance.

There are all kinds of factors that feed into a world-record marathon performance. These range from training methods, nutrition, supplementation and biometrics, to performance analysis, and of course, clothing and shoe technology.

NCACC FILM FESTIVAL

Continued from page 6



tions Student Film Festival was an incredible experience," Meledez said. "I was genuinely impressed by the students' presentations, their creativity, growth and the level of skill they displayed through film. It was inspiring to see young talent develop their voices and tell meaningful stories, and the educators behind them deserve recognition for helping cultivate that potential."

As a New York native who has only lived in North Carolina for a few years, Meledez said the festival also deepened his appreciation and understanding of the state itself.

"Beyond the event itself, I also walked away learning more about North Carolina," he said. "This state continues to amaze me – the culture, the sense of community, the diversity, the politics and especially its deep history. Coming from the North, where my perspective was shaped by a different lens, it was eye-opening to better understand the divisions, systems and historical realities that still connect to the present day. I appreciate having the opportunity to learn more about the state I now call home."

As the festival continues to grow, organizers hope it will eventually expand beyond North Carolina while still maintaining its focus on community-centered storytelling. Brielle Barozzini said she envisions the NCACC 100 Strong Productions Student Film Festival becoming a nationwide platform where young filmmakers from across the country can share stories, showcase their work across state lines and connect with one another through film and storytelling.

the eyes of her daughter, the film explored sacrifice, immigration, public service and family legacy while highlighting the family's commitment to giving back to the community that welcomed them.

Following the screenings, students participated in a filmmaker Q&A session where audience members asked about editing software, filming techniques, storytelling approaches and the challenges of documenting real-life experiences.

Among those attending the festival was Alex Meledez, founder of The GRID – Groundwork, Resilience, Innovation, Drive – a nonprofit organization committed to empowering youth from inner cities through mentorship, education, discipline and opportunity.

"Attending the 100 Strong Produc-

Beyond The Draft: How HBCU Athletes Continue To Fight For NFL Visibility

By Judaea Ingram

Special To The Carolinian

For many college football players, the NFL Draft represents the culmination of years of work, sacrifice, and expectation. But for athletes from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the path to that moment often looks different, less guaranteed, more uncertain, and heavily dependent on visibility rather than talent alone.

Even as the 2026 NFL Draft unfolded, HBCU athletes remained part of a broader conversation about opportunity in professional football. While no players were selected directly from HBCU programs this year, the presence of HBCU-connected talent was still felt through athletes who began their careers at HBCUs before transferring to larger programs and ultimately reaching the draft stage.

Former North Carolina A&T standout Karon Prunty was selected by the New England Patriots after continuing his development at the FBS level. Former Jackson State



wide receiver Kevin Coleman was also drafted by the Miami Dolphins, and former Arkansas-Pine Bluff defensive back Andre Fuller heard his name called by the Seattle Seahawks. Each player carried a connection to the HBCU landscape, reflecting a growing pattern where exposure at higher-profile programs becomes part of the pathway to draft recognition.

Programs like North Carolina Central University and Shaw University continue to develop talent that com-

petes at a high level, even if national attention does not always reflect it. Coaches and supporters argue that the issue is not a lack of skill, but a lack of consistent visibility compared to larger Power Five programs.

To address that gap, initiatives such as HBCU showcases and NFL scouting events have created additional opportunities for athletes to be evaluated. These platforms allow players to perform in front of scouts who might not otherwise attend HBCU games during the regular sea-

son.

Still, challenges remain. Many HBCU athletes must consistently outperform expectations to receive the same level of attention as their counterparts at larger programs. The pipeline to the NFL exists, but it is narrower and often requires additional steps, including transfers or standout performances in limited exposure settings.

Only a small group of roughly half a dozen true HBCU program players entered the 2026 NFL Draft cycle with draftable expectations, underscoring the limited visibility and narrow pipeline from HBCU football to the professional level.

For players, that reality shapes their mindset. The goal is no longer just getting drafted, but staying ready for any opportunity, at any time, and in any environment where their talent can be seen.

Whether selected directly or developed through multiple program paths, HBCU-connected athletes continue to represent a legacy of resilience and excellence that stretches far beyond draft weekend.

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