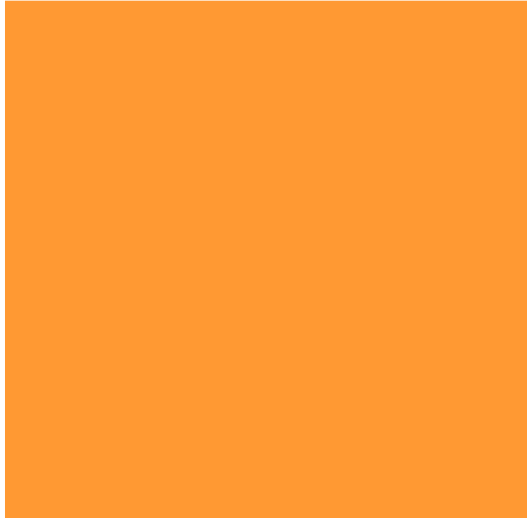




# 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: A Key Moment for North Carolina's Recovery and Equitable Growth



NORTH CAROLINA  
**JUSTICE  
CENTER**  
[www.ncjustice.org](http://www.ncjustice.org)





## Our Mission

The NC Justice Center is dedicated to transforming North Carolina's prosperity into opportunity for all. Our mission is to eliminate poverty in North Carolina by ensuring every household in the state has access to the resources, services, and fair treatment it needs to achieve economic security. To make opportunity and prosperity for all a reality, we work toward:

Jobs that are safe, pay a living wage, and provide benefits

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Access to quality and affordable health care

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Quality public education for every child

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Consumer protections from abusive practices

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Safe and affordable housing

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Public investments that expand opportunities  
for economic security

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A just and stable revenue system that adequately funds public  
investments while fairly distributing tax responsibility

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A fair and non-discriminatory criminal justice system,  
from arrest to reentry

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Equitable treatment for everyone in North Carolina—regardless  
of race, ethnicity, country of origin, citizenship status, religion,  
disability, age, sex, gender identity,  
or sexual orientation

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## JANUARY 2025

As North Carolina lawmakers begin a new legislative session, we call on our state's leaders to act boldly in support of our neighbors in Western

North Carolina, who are still recovering from Hurricane Helene.

In addition to addressing near-term needs, we must take this opportunity to build more resilient and equitable systems to prevent the precarious circumstances in which too many of our fellow North Carolinians found themselves even before the storm's devastation.

This legislative agenda offers policy recommendations to better insulate North Carolina from future crises, break

down barriers to economic mobility, and ensure all North Carolinians have the opportunities and resources they need to thrive.

Together, we can tackle the challenges of tomorrow with a broad, progressive vision that leaves no one behind. Importantly, many of these priorities will be led by our partners and key coalitions whose lived experiences are vital to the advocacy effort.

*Our top priorities for the 2025 legislative session are denoted with an asterisk (\*).*



## Ensure long-term stability of state revenues

- Support a fair and equitable tax structure that raises adequate revenues to fully fund the institutions, services, and support necessary for everyone in our state to thrive





## **Increase economic support and safety net programs for working families**

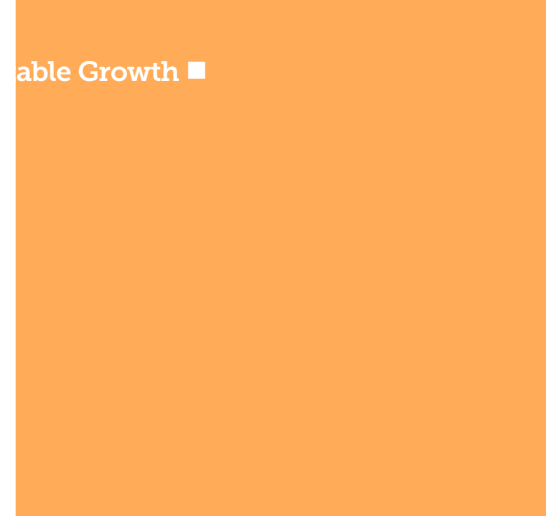
- \*Increase funding for childcare subsidies to reduce the wait list for working parents who seek childcare financial assistance
- Invest resources to increase the take-up rate for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and reinstate North Carolina's Earned Income Tax Credit
- Increase North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit levels and remove the parent co-pay requirement for childcare services

## **\*Reform North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance program to support workers and insulate the broader economy**

- Increase the duration for receiving benefits to 26 weeks
- Change the calculation of weekly benefit amounts to be based on wages paid in the highest-paid quarter of the benefit period divided by 26
- Increase the maximum benefit amount from \$350, an amount set over ten years ago, to \$574, a wage replacement rate of 50 percent of the statewide average weekly wage
- Adjust the maximum benefit amount annually for increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- Re-establish eligibility for leaving work because of family hardship
- Repeal the waiting period for benefits
- End overpayment collections when the claimant is not at fault
- Allow more part-time workers to qualify for benefits

- Keep workers employed by establishing a Short-Time Compensation program, also known as work-sharing





## **\*Improve wages and benefits for workers so they can meet the needs of their families**

- Raise the North Carolina minimum wage
- Ensure everyone in North Carolina has access to paid family leave to welcome the birth or adoption of a child, provide extended medical care for a sick loved one, and recover from illness
- Guarantee workers have a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves, sick children, and parents
- Ensure workers can use existing paid or unpaid sick time for preventative health care and family caregiving needs (kin care)
- Ensure workers who are survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking can take existing paid or unpaid sick time to seek necessary services and support (safe time)
- Ensure inclusive family definition in paid leave, paid sick days, kin care, and safe time legislation



## **\*Improve worker safety**

- Adopt legislation requiring employers to develop emergency plans to protect worker safety when threatening conditions occur, such as natural disasters, airborne infectious diseases, and extreme heat
- Adopt legislation improving the safety of migrant farmworker housing



## **\*Ensure workers can improve their working conditions through collective bargaining and the freedom to move between jobs**

- Increase job mobility by limiting the use of restrictive employment agreements
- Ensure all employees, including public employees, can engage in collective bargaining to improve their workplaces



## Protect the well-being of North Carolinians by improving health care systems

- \*Advance efforts to address medical debt, including codifying the provisions of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) medical debt relief program and other protections
- Ensure every person in North Carolina can fully access and utilize comprehensive, equitable health care when they need it without exception, free from discrimination and intimidation
- Oppose any legislation that attempts to weaken Medicaid by hindering access to the program, such as work reporting requirements
- Protect people who receive Medicaid by ensuring they understand their rights and can provide feedback so that NCDHHS and other stakeholders can use that information to make policy changes
- Ensure that Medicaid Advisory Committee and Beneficiary Advisory Council members can provide input and feedback to ensure improved experience and access to services
- Oppose legislation that would further restrict access to reproductive care
- Grant full practice authority to more providers; streamlining regulations to allow Advanced Practice Registered Nurses to fully utilize their training can lessen the impact of physician shortages in rural areas without compromising the quality of health care



## Provide increased access to economic opportunity and protection for those in the immigrant community

- \*Provide in-state tuition for North Carolina's youth, regardless of their immigration status
- \*Protect the immigrant community from harmful legislation
- Establish access to driver's licenses or state-issued identification cards for the undocumented immigrant community
- Increase employment opportunities for work-authorized individuals, including those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), through expanded access to occupational and professional licenses
- Enact legislation that requires local law enforcement agencies to respond to U Visa certification requests to protect immigrant survivors of crimes and ensure they have access to systems of care



## Support programs that protect and aid tenants, homeowners, and consumers

### Increase access to safe, decent, and affordable housing

- \*Increase protections for homeowners living in communities governed by homeowners' associations, including homeowner association (HOA) foreclosures

- \*Ensure adequate funds are available to assist homeowners and tenants affected by Hurricane Helene
- \*Oppose legislation that weakens the rights of tenants
- Substantially increase recurring funding to the North Carolina Housing

### Trust Fund and Workforce Housing Loan Fund

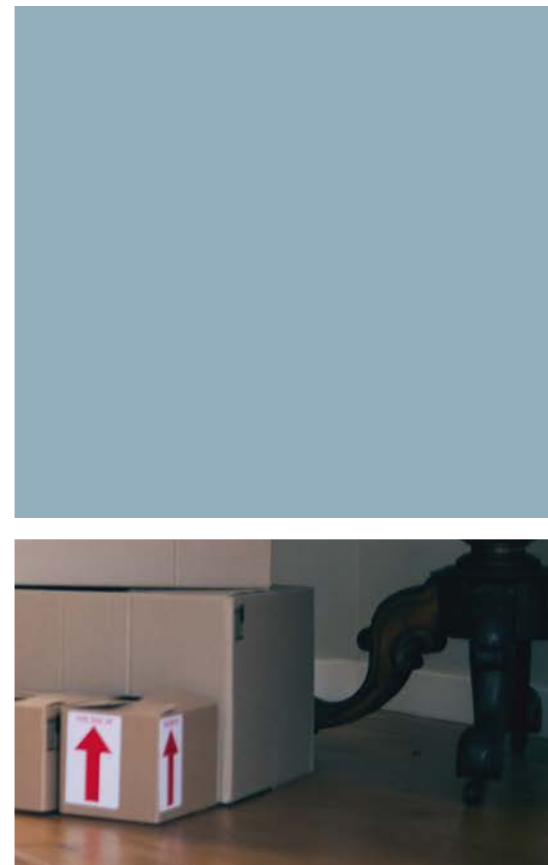
- Establish a process to remove an eviction filing from a tenant's record when the case is resolved
- Limit background screening businesses' use of eviction court records when no judgment is entered against the tenant
- Update the state's property tax relief programs to further reduce the burden on low-income families while protecting the most vital source of revenue for local governments
- Reduce local governments' restrictions and barriers to building affordable housing
- Promote incentives and processes that

encourage community ownership of manufactured home parks

- Enact common-sense regulations of residential property wholesalers
- Expand the transportation options available to our communities to include more active transportation (safe bicycle and pedestrian options), affordable and reliable transit, and other clean transportation modes, especially for seniors, people with disabilities, and communities of color

### **\*Protect consumers from abusive predatory lending and other harmful practices**

- Improve our state's legal protections against debt settlement companies



- Reduce burdensome medical debt and protect patients in their dealings with medical creditors, medical debt buyers, and medical debt collectors
- Oppose legislation that weakens North Carolina laws against debt-buyer and debt-collection practices
- Oppose legislation weakening rent-to-own regulations
- Protect existing North Carolina mortgage lending and mortgage broker laws
- Oppose legislation that legalizes payday lending, car title lending, or other predatory products such as Earned Wage Access products
- Oppose increased rates and fees on consumer loans

**Ensure people with low incomes have access to affordable, environmentally sustainable energy**

- Support energy efficiency, urgent repair, and weatherization programs for individuals and families with low incomes
- Support renewable energy and retire expensive, inefficient coal-fired power plants
- Oppose legislation that raises electric rates or changes utility regulations without protecting and assisting consumers with low incomes
- Fully leverage state and federal funding streams such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act to increase weatherization protections, enable installation of energy-saving equipment, and make building upgrades in low-income communities





## **Rebuild North Carolina's workforce by promoting opportunities for people who have prior criminal charges or convictions and improve fairness and equity in the justice system**

### **Facilitate the successful reentry of people with criminal records**

- Provide proper treatment for individuals in prison with behavioral and substance use conditions
- Provide funding and incentives to significantly increase housing and employment opportunities, especially for people exiting prison and people on the sex offense registry
- Provide funding for legal services to assist with expunctions and driver's license restoration

### **Reduce the population and improve living conditions in North Carolina prisons**

- Mandate early release based on length of time from release date, conviction type, and sentence disparity with current sentencing laws
- End solitary confinement
- Abolish the death penalty



## Increase opportunities to expunge criminal records

- Reduce waiting periods for expunctions of multiple nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions
- Narrow the misdemeanor and felony convictions considered violent and currently excluded from expunction relief
- Increase access to expunction to allow certain convictions to be expunged through the operation of law

## Improve the fairness and equity of North Carolina's criminal justice system

- \*End driver's license suspensions for failure to pay



- \*Prohibit the commercial extortion and exploitation of booking photos (mug shots) as an unfair trade practice
- \*Repeal the disqualification of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for individuals convicted of felony drug offenses
- Reduce court fees and mandate ability to pay protections
- Provide judges the discretion not to require sex offense registration for certain misdemeanor sex offenses
- Repeal the North Carolina Unauthorized Substances Tax (the Drug Tax)
- Extend voting rights to people on probation, parole, or post-release supervision for a felony conviction



## Support the state's public education systems

### Comply with all Leandro court orders to provide a plan for high-quality early education

- \*Expand North Carolina Pre-K to ensure all eligible students can attend a high-quality, full-year prekindergarten program by the 2027-2028 school year
- Expand funding for the childcare subsidy system
- Increase Smart Start funding to meet 25 percent of the statewide need for children from birth to age five by the 2027-2028 school year

## Comply with all Leandro court orders to ensure adequate and equitable K-12 funding

- \*Ensure additional funding to benefit all students, particularly in categories such as classroom teachers, instructional support personnel, teacher assistants, textbooks, and supplies
- \*Expand supplemental funding for disadvantaged students, disabled students, English learners, and low-wealth districts
- Ensure adequate funding for teachers and instructional support personnel to address statewide staffing shortages
- Offer educator pay that is competitive with other professions

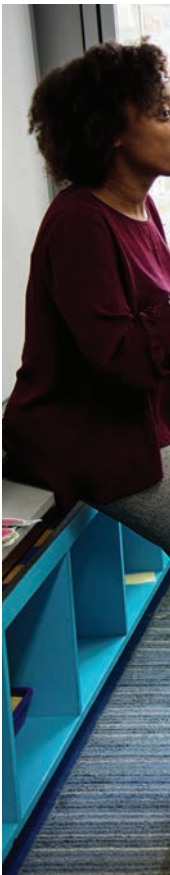


- Implement recommendations from the Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE) Task Force to improve the diversity of the teaching profession
- Overhaul school accountability measures to add additional, non-test-based measures of school quality and minimize the role of raw test scores
- Offer support for high-poverty schools such as a fully staffed Department of Public Instruction District & Regional Support team and technical assistance for Community Schools models



**Provide necessary measures to create a world-class education system and help students compensate for interruptions to education created by the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Helene**

- \*Bring school support staff (e.g., nurses, school counselors, and social workers) ratios in line with nationally recognized industry recommendations
- Close the digital divide for students by funding school technology infrastructure and expanding broadband access, particularly in rural and low-income communities
- Provide schools with supplementary funding to expand learning time via expanded calendar and after-school opportunities
- Create incentives and provide technical assistance to districts implementing school integration plans







- Address the current backlog of capital needs through a statewide school bond
- Cap school privatization options that exacerbate segregation and increase costs
- Improve accountability provisions for school privatization options

**Prevent students from experiencing harm due to legislation impacting mental health supports, prohibitions on truthful teaching of racial discrimination, and attempts to ban access to books or instructional materials**

- Adopt legislation that encourages a positive, supportive learning environment for all students
- Oppose efforts to interfere with teachers' ability to have honest conversations about the history of racial discrimination
- Prevent legislation that would facilitate censorship and banning of instructional materials
- Remove law enforcement from North Carolina's public schools to ensure schools become safe

for North Carolina's families, specifically Black, brown, and immigrant families

- Enact legislation that disrupts the school-to-prison (to deportation) pipeline and provides alternatives to suspension, expulsion, and incarceration of young people

**Reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline**

- Improve due process for short-term suspensions
- Explore improvements to long-term suspension and expulsion processes and reporting requirements



- Limit unnecessary referrals to alternative schools
- Limit the use of exclusionary discipline in early grades and early childhood



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The NC Justice Center's work is made possible by generous support from individuals, businesses, and foundations. Thank you for ensuring our work to build prosperity and opportunity for all North Carolinians can continue.

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COVER PHOTOS: Hurricane Helene damage in western NC by Thomas "Badger" Mabry/honeybadgerimages.  
(Main image: Melissa Dean and Stefani Maehrlein braving a broken bridge)

PHOTO PAGE 1: Overview of Helene flooding at Silver Creek, NC by EPA.