Buncombe County Legislative Priorities

2025 –26 Biennium · North Carolina General Assembly

TOP PRIORITY

Local Government Recovery and Stabilization Grants

Allocation of recovery funds directly to local jurisdictions to stabilize local government revenue, stabilize law enforcement and public safety funding, and aid in ongoing recovery efforts including household assistance, infrastructure repair, and small business support. The impacts of revenue losses have already necessitated a reduction in services and the education budget allocation.

TOP PRIORITY

Permanent Housing Solutions for Displaced People

The County's housing stock was constrained before the storm and now countless residents have been displaced from their homes either for the short term or lost them indefinitely. The County advocates for a block grant model with state appropriations made directly to counties for new housing, reconstruction, rehabilitation and repair. The General Assembly should also consider repurposing underutilized state-owned land — including sites in the Swannanoa and Woodfin communities — for the construction of new permanent housing.

TOP PRIORITY

Additional Support for Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

Additional funding is needed for technical assistance activities including administration, engineering, and permitting fees associated with participation in the EWP program. By increasing the proportion of funds allocated to technical assistance, EWP participation will improve and meet the new demands created by Hurricane Helene.

POLICY PRIORITY

Legislation Delaying Equalization of Public Service Companies

Legislation delaying the scheduled equalization of public service companies due to the deferred FY25 property revaluations.

POLICY PRIORITY

Additional Resources for Mental and Behavioral Health

Support additional resources for mental and behavioral health including for emergency responders, law enforcement, and state employees.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITY

Additional State Funding for State Employee Salaries

Additional state funding for state employees, including K–12 and Community College education employee salaries.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITY

Business Recovery Loans and Grants

Establishment and significant allocation of funds for a small business forgivable loan model with job and investment milestones and forgiveness terms similar to those found in economic incentive programs. This would allow small businesses to continue or restart operations with the support of a potentially forgivable loan, providing further sustainability for the community as a whole.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITY

Water and Sewer System Expansion and Redundancy

Funding for residents of impacted communities to make residential septic repairs, as well as to facilitate expansion of the current system to include the Candler Extension project — one of the County's top priorities on the 2024 legislative agenda. Additional funding is requested for redundancy and water system extension to connect to local utility providers and ensure service for local and state assets.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITY

State Funding for Emergency Response Infrastructure, Equipment, and Vehicles

Emergency response needs including ambulance apparatus replacement ($1.26M), fire department equipment, and preparedness and resiliency facilities to support future disaster events.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITY

Reimbursement for Local School Consolidation Study (S.L. 2023-128)

The County respectfully requests reimbursement of $300,000 for costs incurred related to the school consolidation study required by the General Assembly in 2023. The County has finalized the study and submitted it to the General Assembly. This request was previously a priority on the 2024 legislative agenda.

Helene Relief Legislation

Working with the Governor's office, General Assembly leadership, WNC stakeholders and the Buncombe County delegation, the County pursued additional Helene relief funding in the form of two 2025 bills:

- **House Bill 47** – appropriated $524 million, approved in March
  - $120M for home reconstruction and repair
  - $100M for private road and bridge repairs
  - $55M for small business infrastructure grants
  - $20M for debris and sediment removal
  - $10M for volunteer fire departments and nonprofit repairs
- **House Bill 1012** – appropriated $700 million, approved in June
  - An additional $75M for private road and bridge repairs
  - $70M for local government capital repairs
  - $64M for school reconstruction and repair
  - $51.5M for local government cash flow loans
  - $18M for volunteer fire department and EMS grants

Additional Legislative Items

- **Modification of Article 39 of NCGS 105 to return more sales tax revenue to the classroom**
  - In 2025, the County successfully Senate Bill 131 – Temp. Local Sales Tax Changes/Buncombe Co.
  - The legislation enacted a modification to Article 39 to allow a larger percentage of sales tax revenue to be spent on school operational expenses
  - The modification expires on June 30, 2027
  - The language ultimately became law in House Bill 309

Additional Legislative Items

- **Restoration of Buncombe County's eligibility for the PRC 071 state salary supplement for teachers**
  - The County has spent considerable time and resources advocating for this, both during the 2025 Long Session and 2026 Short Session

Additional Legislative Items

- **House Property Tax Reform Proposals**
  - Advocating for local authority over property tax decisions
  - Promoting reform of circuit breaker and homestead exemptions

Additional Legislative Items

- **Senate Property Tax Proposal**
  - Actively seeking an exemption for Helene impacted communities
  - Educating lawmakers on the financial impacts of the equalization statute on the proposed moratorium