

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021**

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HOUSE BILL 796

Short Title: Improve Legislative Transparency 2021. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Ball, Insko, Lofton, and John (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

May 4, 2021

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO CREATE THE NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY TECHNOLOGY
TASK FORCE AND TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO INCREASE LEGISLATIVE
TRANSPARENCY AND IMPLEMENT CLOSED CAPTIONING FOR LEGISLATIVE
PROCEEDINGS.

Whereas, the North Carolina General Assembly seeks to operate in a manner that is open and transparent to the public; and

Whereas, the North Carolina General Assembly continues to enhance the technology used by its members, staff, and the general public; and

Whereas, it may be challenging to follow the movement of a bill from filing, through committee with amendments and committee substitutes, to floor votes and passage over to the alternate chamber and through its procedures, with potential substantial changes from the original content and title; and

Whereas, video broadcasts of House Legislative sessions are now available to the public but not accessible to those who are hard-of-hearing or deaf; Now, therefore, The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Findings. – The North Carolina General Assembly should have the means to operate efficiently and effectively, whether members and staff are present on the legislative campus, teleworking, or some combination thereof, and the public should have easy, 24/7 access to meetings, materials, and the opportunity to provide comment, through a variety of modes, to include audio and video replay via website and telephone, and online access to forms and archived materials. Further, the North Carolina General Assembly should comply with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by offering closed captioning and/or transcription services.

SECTION 2.(a) There is created the North Carolina General Assembly Technology Task Force (Technology Task Force). The Technology Task Force shall investigate the current status of information technology operations at the North Carolina General Assembly to ensure that the General Assembly runs seamlessly, whether under normal or exceptional circumstances such as a pandemic or weather-related event, and to ensure meaningful public participation for individuals with disabilities and those with limited connectivity.

SECTION 2.(b) The Technology Task Force shall consist of 15 members as follows:

- (1) The Director of the Information Services Division of the General Assembly and two employees of the Division appointed by the Director.
- (2) One senator and one Senate legislative assistant appointed by the Majority Leader of the Senate.



- 1 (3) One senator and one Senate legislative assistant appointed by the Minority
2 Leader of the Senate.
- 3 (4) One representative and one House legislative assistant appointed by the
4 Majority Leader of the House of Representatives.
- 5 (5) One representative and one House legislative assistant appointed by the
6 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.
- 7 (6) Four members of the public jointly selected by the Majority and Minority
8 Leaders of each chamber as follows:
 - 9 a. An individual who represents the disabilities community.
 - 10 b. A registered lobbyist.
 - 11 c. A State agency legislative liaison.
 - 12 d. A member of the press.

13 **SECTION 2.(c)** The appointing authorities shall select individuals who regularly use
14 the General Assembly website and other technology provided by the General Assembly. All
15 appointments to the Technology Task Force shall be made no later than August 1, 2021. The
16 Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate shall jointly appoint a Senate cochair. The Majority
17 and Minority Leaders of the House of Representatives shall appoint a House cochair. Vacancies
18 shall be filled by the appointing authority. The Technology Task Force shall meet upon the joint
19 call of the cochairs. A majority of the Technology Task Force shall constitute a quorum.
20 Members of the Technology Task Force shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel
21 allowances in accordance with G.S. 120-3.1, 138-5, or 138-6 as appropriate. Subject to the
22 approval of the Legislative Services Commission, the Technology Task Force may meet in the
23 State Legislative Building or the Legislative Office Building. The Legislative Services
24 Commission, through the Legislative Services Officer, shall assign professional staff to assist in
25 the work of the Technology Task Force. The House of Representatives' and the Senate's Directors
26 of Legislative Assistants shall assign clerical staff to the Technology Task Force, and the
27 expenses relating to the clerical employees shall be borne by the Technology Task Force. The
28 Technology Task Force, while in the discharge of its official duties, may exercise all the powers
29 provided under the provisions of G.S. 120-19 and G.S. 120-19.1 through G.S. 120-19.4,
30 including the power to request all officers, agents, agencies, and departments of the State to
31 provide any information, data, or documents within their possession, ascertainable from their
32 records, or otherwise available to them.

33 **SECTION 2.(d)** The Technology Task Force shall study all of the following:

- 34 (1) How other states have implemented meaningful public participation for
35 individuals with disabilities and those with limited connectivity.
- 36 (2) Technology, including hardware and software, telephony, and other
37 prerequisite infrastructure to enable legislators and staff to work efficiently
38 and effectively, whether present on the legislative campus, teleworking, or
39 some combination thereof.
- 40 (3) Any other issues the Technology Task Force deems relevant to its work.

41 **SECTION 2.(e)** The Technology Task Force shall develop a three-year plan for the
42 installation, deployment, and testing of all recommended technology, including cost estimates
43 for implementation of the plan, and report its findings and recommendations to the Legislative
44 Services Commission by March 31, 2022. The Technology Task Force shall terminate upon the
45 earlier of the filing of its report or March 31, 2022.

46 **SECTION 3.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the General Assembly
47 the sum of one hundred twenty thousand dollars (\$120,000) in nonrecurring funds for the
48 2021-2022 fiscal year. The funds shall be allocated as follows:

- 49 (1) \$95,000 to plan and deploy a one-year trial of closed captioning of legislative
50 proceedings.
- 51 (2) \$25,000 to the Division of Information Systems to be used to:

- 1 a. Determine how to enhance the North Carolina General Assembly's
2 current web-based bill tracking system; and
3 b. Plan, install, deploy, and test a closed captioning system for video
4 broadcasts and video replays of daily legislative sessions and any
5 recorded committee meetings.

6 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.