



SEAN DONG NYT Illustration

A word to the wise: Don't trust artificial intelligence to file your taxes this year.

In today's paper
SPORTS: NC State struggled with late-game execution all year. **1B**



kmckeown@newsobserver.com



Our website features local news and sports content important to you. newsobserver.com

The News & Observer

NEWSOBSERVER.COM

NC's health plan overhaul cuts costs depending on provider

BY LUCIANA PEREZ URIBE GUINASSI
lperezu@newsobserver.com

Many North Carolina state employees could soon receive more of their health care through a structure that encourages them to choose certain providers to achieve savings for both themselves and the plan.

That follows a vote Tuesday by the State Health Plan Board of Trustees approving the implementation of a three-tier network structure.

"The fundamental principle we're talking about is steering patient volume to those who want to work with the State Health Plan for access and pricing," said Thomas Friedman, the plan's executive administrator. "We cannot let providers charge whatever they want for things and get the same access to patients."

The three tiers will be:



ROBERT WILLETT rwillett@newsobserver.com

North Carolina Treasurer Brad Briner, seen here during a Council of State meeting on Feb. 4, 2025, said "I recognize that no one wants any increase in out-of-pocket costs. Unfortunately, this is not our reality today."

- Preferred
- Access
- Non-preferred

Members and the plan would

pay less when preferred providers are used, and more when non-preferred providers are used. Preferred providers, meanwhile, would get more

SEE HEALTH PLAN, 3A

patients.

The State Health Plan provides health insurance for more than 750,000 state workers, retirees and their family members.

Earlier this year, the plan's board of trustees had already approved contracts with three clinically integrated networks, or groups of health care providers: Aledade, Community Care Physician Network and UNC Health Alliance. When members go to these providers, they see savings.

The plan also launched last year a surgical benefit with Lantern, a specialty care platform, to offer certain surgeries at no cost to members. The plan pays less when these providers are used. Novant Health and EmergeOrtho joined that partnership.

The next phase of that expansion will include maternity

NC elections board declines request to hand count 220 ballots

BY KYLE INGRAM
kingram@newsobserver.com

RALEIGH

The North Carolina State Board of Elections on Wednesday declined to take up Senate leader Phil Berger's unusual request to recount a subsection of votes by hand in his highly watched primary election against Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page, who leads by 23 votes.

Berger, a Republican and one of the most powerful politicians in the state, asked the board to pull out 217 undervotes — where voters were recorded as not having marked a preference in his Senate race — and recount them by hand to see if any machines had failed to pick up a ballot mark. He also asked that they recount three overvotes, where voters had picked more than one candidate in a contest.

There is no specific function in state law for recounting undervotes, which are not flagged by ballot machines because voters can intentionally leave a

SEE BALLOTS, 3A



RICHARD STRADLING rstradling@newsobserver.com

Natalia Duque-Wilckens was hit and killed while crossing Clark Avenue at Pogue Street in Raleigh on Nov. 11, 2025. The city is adding stop signs to the intersection.

Raleigh to place new stop signs intersections on Clark Avenue

BY RICHARD STRADLING
rstradling@newsobserver.com

RALEIGH

The city will erect stop signs at three intersections on Clark Avenue near N.C. State University, including the one with Pogue Street where a biology professor was hit and killed in a crosswalk last fall.

The signs, due to go up within the next week, will create four-way-stop intersections at Pogue, Home and Chamberlain streets, in a bid to slow drivers on Clark and improve safety for pedestrians. Up to now, drivers on Clark have not had to stop at those intersections.

Clark Avenue parallels Hillsborough Street and is a popular alternate route. Between 9,000

and 10,000 drivers a day use Clark at those intersections, many exceeding the posted speed limit of 30 mph, according to a city analysis completed after last fall's fatal crash.

This section of Clark is lined with homes and apartment buildings in a neighborhood near the NCSU campus and The Village District where a lot of people get around on foot.

Natalia Duque-Wilckens was crossing the street on Nov. 11 when she was hit by a pickup truck turning left from Pogue onto Clark. Duque-Wilckens, 41, died later at a hospital.

The driver, Jack Thomas Etheridge, 19, of Waxhaw, was charged with misdemeanor death by vehicle and failure to

SEE STOP SIGNS, 3A

Durham rap trio 83 Babies member killed in shooting

BY VIRGINIA BRIDGES
vbridges@newsobserver.com

DURHAM

On Monday morning, Durham police released the names of the two men killed Friday night.

But across the Bull City and the larger rap community, word of the death of a local rapper spread within hours of the double killing.

Just before midnight Friday, police found Tevin Burney, 23, and Jarrett Godfrey, 26, shot in a car near North Roxboro Street.

A woman who was also shot suffered non-life-threatening injuries, police said in a news release.

No other information, including about any possible motive or suspects, has been released about the case.

Burney became widely known as Young Boss Tevo, or YBT, as a member of the once-rising Durham rap group 83 Babies.

DURHAM RAP GROUP 83 BABIES

83 Babies was named after the Eight Trey Gangster Crips, a violent street gang known to frequent the Braggtown area in northern Durham over the years, according to court documents in cases involving members of the rap group.

SEE SHOOTING, 4A



We're dedicated to delivering the journalism you rely on. Discover the stories that matter to you inside. Subscribers, explore more stories and features like puzzles and games at newsobserver.com/edition.

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE QUESTIONS, CALL US AT: 800-522-4205

OR, REACH US ONLINE AT: newsobserver.com/customer-service

