



The News & Observer

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NC state employees' health plan faces big changes

BY LUCIANA PEREZ URIBE GUINASSI
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North Carolina state employees enrolled in the State Health Plan could see big changes to their health coverage, with many of those changes riding on pivotal Board of Trustees votes set for July.

Republican State Treasurer Brad Briner, who is in charge

of the plan, emphasized the significance at the board's June meeting.

"July's meeting is perhaps the most consequential meeting this board's ever had," Briner said.

On July 10, trustees are set to vote on a series of proposals affecting the hundreds of thousands of state workers, retirees and dependents covered by the plan.

Among the biggest changes is a new benefits structure that would steer members toward hospitals and physician practices designated as "preferred providers."

Here's how it'll work, according to information shared to date, and a look at some other changes ahead:

PREFERRED PROVIDERS

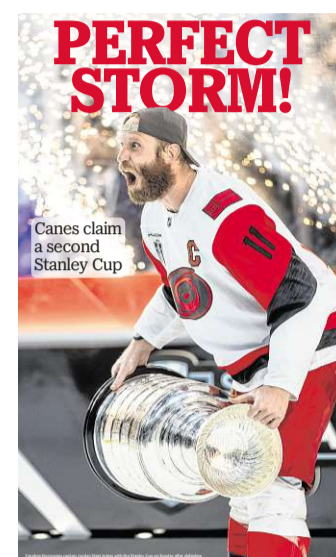
Under the preferred provider

structure, which does not apply to retirees covered under Medicare Advantage plans, State Health Plan members will see lower costs, such as through reduced copays, when they use preferred providers.

Meanwhile, costs at "access" providers will be held at this year's cost structure. There will also be non-preferred

SEE CHANGES, 5A

COMING FRIDAY



Be sure and pick up Friday's print edition, which will include a **new commemorative edition front page and a 12-page special section** about the Canes' winning season, with expanded coverage, poster pages, game and player highlights, and championship moments. We also will rerun the **commemorative "Perfect Storm!" front page** from Tuesday inside the special section.

Subscribers will get it with their **print and digital replica editions**. Others will be **available for purchase** at Triangle retailers including Publix, Harris Teeter, Food Lion and Lowe's Foods while supplies last.

Durham locks out federal and AI agencies from police data

BY KRISTEN JOHNSON
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DURHAM

Durham is setting strict rules for how the city's police department can obtain and use surveillance technology.

The action comes two weeks after the Durham City Council approved a \$16 million contract with Axon Enterprise Inc. for new police drones, cameras and software.

In a resolution Monday night, the council sets parameters for how data will be collected, stored and audited before the Axon contract is officially executed. The document is similar to Community Control Over Police Surveillance, or CCOPS, ordinances some U.S. cities have requiring police departments to get public approval and government oversight before obtaining new surveillance technology.

"This is a good start," Councilman Nate Baker said. "I think we can go further in the future if we want to ... There are some tangible impacts that this resolution has."

The resolution forces the city manager to build strict privacy, artificial intelligence and encryption rules into the city's operating policies. The resolution differs from an ordinance since the rules only will affect how the city handles surveillance technology contracts and its own use. The city did not make a new criminal law regarding drones or AI, which is what an ordinance would do.

WHAT DOES THE RESOLUTION DO?

The document responds to the council's request for written protections for civil liber-

SEE POLICE DATA, 8A



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Raleigh firefighters work a structure fire on Method Road in Raleigh, May 24, 2025.

Raleigh is adding firefighters. Union says it's not enough

BY NOLAN WILKINSON
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Raleigh is adding a dozen firefighters, but the firefighters' union says that's not enough to respond to fires quickly as the city grows.

"The city continues to grow and annex land and expand its footprint," said Caleb Lewis, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 548, a union he said represents 80% of the city's firefighters. "But they're

failing to add the necessary staffing."

The Raleigh Fire Department had just over 550 firefighter positions in March, according to a union news release at the time.

Lewis says a city Raleigh's size should have 150 more firefighters.

The city's fire master plan, which came out in July 2025 calls for 18 new positions by this coming fiscal year rather than the 12 in the budget.

But the plan came out too late to get started in fiscal

2026, so the just-passed budget for fiscal 2027 was the first opportunity the city had to begin implementing it.

The department also had 56 vacancies in May, said city spokesperson Robin Deacle, though the latest fire academy graduated 20 firefighters, which will help fill some of those positions.

NEED GROWING MORE QUICKLY THAN POPULATION

The current staffing leads to significant overtime, and

there still aren't enough firefighters on duty at a time despite that, Lewis said.

From 2021 to 2025, the number of incidents handled by the fire department annually went from about 47,000 to almost 62,000, an increase of over 30%.

That's a bigger increase than Raleigh's population, which has grown by 8% to just over 506,000 people in that same time period.

"This growth pattern suggests that demand for emergency services is outpacing population growth, indicating both increased community needs and potentially changing demographics," the fire master plan reads.

SEE FIREFIGHTERS, 2A

NC State ghost, urban legend walk planned in Raleigh this weekend

BY JANE WINIK SARTWELL
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North Carolina State University is haunted.

That's according to Tim Peeler, N.C. State's marketing writer and university history expert. He told The News & Observer he "can confirm that NC State was haunted before the doors opened in 1889."

There's the demolished orphanage on Centennial Campus. The influenza patients who died in Winslow Hall back when it was used as an infirmary. The suspicious activity in the steam tunnels that snake below campus.

Chancellor Kevin Howell has

told new employees, in jest, not to work in Holladay Hall — the oldest building on campus — past 5 p.m. or on weekends, Peeler wrote in 2025 in one of his stories about NC State's ghostly history.

Want to see for yourself?

This weekend, Triangle Walking Tours will offer a Ghost and Urban Legend Walk at NC State. The one-hour tour, which costs \$15, will leave from Titmus Theater at 10 p.m. on Friday, June 19, Saturday, June 20, and Sunday, June 21. The tour is not affiliated with the university.

STORIES OF DEMONIC CREATURES IN NC STATE'S TUNNELS

Triangle Walking Tours owner Andrew Nason told The N&O



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NC State fans celebrate at the Memorial Belltower on campus after the men's basketball team's 76-64 win over Duke to advance to the Final Four in the NCAA Men's Division I Basketball Tournament on Sunday, March 31, 2024.

that he offers this tour only occasionally because he gets so many requests to bring it back. Nason likes to run the tour in the summer so it doesn't disturb students.

"When people think of ghost stories, they don't typically think of land grant universities from the late 19th century

SEE GHOST, 2A



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