

PRESS RELEASE



**OCRACOKE
ACCESS
ALLIANCE**

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NC Budget Impasses Threatens NC Ferry Service Statewide

Ocracoke, NC – Despite proposing an historic level of funding for the North Carolina Ferry Division in the never-approved State Biennial Budget, the current impasse between the House and Senate in the North Carolina General Assembly over so-called “mini-budgets” could result in dramatic reductions in ferry operations and deferment of all non-emergency ferry maintenance, affecting Ocracoke Island and all other ferry-dependent communities.

Before adjourning until late October, the NC Senate approved \$4 million for external shipyard work on the ferry *Sea Level* which has of necessity already been contracted for in order for the work to be completed over the winter such that the Sea Level can be put back into service in the Spring. The House version of the “mini-budget” did not contain these funds and was not even voted upon. In addition, neither Chamber approved an additional \$3 million necessary for the Ferry Division to maintain levels of service.

“We know our State Representatives and Senators support the Ferry Division as evidenced by the proposed budget”, said Executive Director Justin LeBlanc. “We urge the General Assembly to approve these funding lines at the earliest opportunity”.

In the absence of these additional funds, temporary employees could be laid off and some ferry routes could see reductions of 50%. The most heavily-used route, Hatteras-Ocracoke would see reductions ranging from 22-50% depending upon the day of the week. In addition, the passenger-only ferry operating Hatteras-Ocracoke may be canceled entirely and sound-class ferry routes from the mainland may not be able to operate the more frequent runs of the summer schedule in 2026. (The NC Fiscal Year operates July 1 – June 30).

“While the peak summer season has passed, “shoulder-season” tourism can make the difference between prosperity and calamity for island businesses”, said Bob Chestnut, owner of Ride the Wind Surfshop. “People need this additional economic activity to weather the quiet winter months”.

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The Ocracoke Access Alliance is a 501(c)4 advocacy organization seeking increased funding to address access issues to Ocracoke Island, including ferry operations, highway maintenance and infrastructure improvements on NC-12, beach nourishment, and more.