

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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Halifax Community College Celebrates Class of 2026 at 59th Annual Commencement Ceremony



Class of 2026

WELDON, NORTH CAROLINA – Halifax Community College (HCC) honored the Class of 2026 at its 59th Annual Commencement Ceremony on Friday, May 8, 2026, at the Dr. Ervin V. Griffin, Sr. Centre on campus.

The program began with a prelude performed by Dr. Michael Hawkins, Minister of Music for Oak Grove, Mount Olive, and Carters Chapel in Littleton, North Carolina. The processional featured the traditional “Pomp and Circumstance” by E. Elgar, followed by the Posting of the Colors presented by the Roanoke Rapids High School JROTC under the direction of CW3 Mark Stith.

Ms. Kara A. Clary, MSN, RN, CNE, a Nursing Instructor and the 2025 Instructor of the Year, acted as the grand marshal for the ceremony. She carried the academic mace, a ceremonial staff that leads commencement processions. As grand marshal, she held this symbol of authority, which signals the start and end of the



ceremonies through its placement and removal from center stage. HCC's President, Dr. Patrena Elliott opened the event with a warm welcome followed by greetings and invocation from Reverend Michael Mills, Chairman of the Halifax Community College Board of Trustees.

The commencement address was delivered by Deputy Chief Eddie Buffaloe, Jr., Administrative Services Division of the Raleigh Police Department and retired North Carolina Public Safety Secretary. During his address titled "Stay in Drive," Buffaloe encouraged graduates to continue moving forward with purpose, perseverance, and faith despite obstacles and uncertainty. Using the analogy of a vehicle's gears, he challenged students not to remain "parked" in comfort, trapped in "reverse" by past setbacks, or stuck in "neutral" through fear and hesitation, but instead to remain focused on growth, determination, and forward progress.

Dr. Julie Galvin, Dean of CTE and Health Sciences, presented the Great Within the 58 Excellence Recognition, an honor connected to the North Carolina Community College System's Academic Excellence Awards, recognizing outstanding student achievement. This year's recipient was Crystal Da'jusha Powell, who maintained a 4.0 GPA while earning an Associate in Applied Science degree in Human Services Technology for Social Services. The recognition celebrates students who demonstrate academic excellence while balancing the many responsibilities and challenges often faced by community college students.

During the President's Charge to the Graduates, President Elliott encouraged students to continue striving for excellence in their communities and professions. She reminded them that this was just the beginning for them and they have sufficiently prepared for what lies ahead.

Student Trustee and HCC Student Government Association President Christopher Creecy delivered the student response on behalf of the Class of 2026. Creecy, a graduate of Northampton County Early College and the Associate in Arts program, reflected on perseverance, faith, integrity, and personal growth, encouraging graduates to walk boldly into their purpose while remaining disciplined, compassionate, and committed to making a positive impact in their communities. He reminded fellow graduates that success is defined not only by accomplishments but also by character, resilience, and the willingness to continue growing through life's challenges.

Graduates were also formally welcomed into the HCC Alumni Association by Antonio Squire, Assistant Director of Admissions and a member of the HCC Class of 2008. As members of the HCC alumni community, these graduates now move forward into careers, continued education, military service, and other opportunities equipped with the knowledge and skills to make meaningful contributions within their professions and communities.

The ceremony concluded with the singing of the college alma mater, a benediction from Reverend Mills, and the recessional selection "Far From Home" by Deion Warren.

Halifax Community College commends the Class of 2026 for their achievements and wishes each graduate continued success in all future endeavors.





Halifax Community College's Mission

Halifax Community College strives to meet the diverse needs of our community by providing high-quality, accessible and affordable education and services for a rapidly changing and globally competitive marketplace.

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