

The Tennessee General Assembly



House of Representatives

CAPITOL HILL REVIEW

A weekly wrap-up of legislative news

Contact: Cade Cothren, (615) 741-5185

cade.cothren@capitol.tn.gov

House Republicans Move Forward With Critical Legislation To Combat Welfare Fraud

At the end of February, House Republicans moved forward with critical legislation designed to combat welfare fraud in Tennessee by passing House Bill 227 on the full House floor. Once passed by the Senate, the bill will travel to the desk of Governor Bill Haslam to be signed into law.

House Bill 227, referred to as the *Program Integrity Act*, is the result of over two years of work between Republican lawmakers and the Department of Human Services (DHS) and TennCare. As passed, the important legislation gives these departments more tools in the toolbox to help reduce welfare fraud across the state.

Specifically, the bill creates a new system of enhanced verification in Tennessee, requiring DHS to conduct quarterly data matches and crosscheck this data in various ways to help eliminate fraudulent payments that are being made. As society becomes more mobile, the bill allows DHS to explore joining a multistate cooperative for identifying individuals who currently receive Tennessee benefits but who live in other states.

As people move, get jobs and get married, pass away, or simply falsify their economic statuses, the new computerized crosscheck system created by House Bill 227 will help ensure those who are receiving benefits are only those who actually qualify for the programs and who genuinely need state assistance.

In addition to the new enhanced verification system, the legislation also directs the Tennessee Department of Lottery to report to DHS, on a monthly basis, the name, prize amount, and any other identifying information of welfare recipients who win a prize of \$5,000 or more. While this rule is already in federal statute requiring welfare recipients to self-report this information, this change simply adds an extra layer of security to the process by adding that the Department of Lottery will also report this information to the state.

In Tennessee, studies estimate the state loses approximately \$123 million per year in fraudulent payments to people who are not actually qualified to receive benefits.

The full text of House Bill 227 can be found by visiting the Tennessee General Assembly website at: <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/110/Bill/HB0227.pdf>.

Broadband Accessibility Act Gains Momentum

Earlier this week, House Republicans advanced House Bill 529 through the Business and Utilities Subcommittee, with the legislation gaining much-needed momentum as it continues its path to the full House floor for a final vote.

House Bill 529, the *Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act*, was created after the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) produced a report earlier this year that outlined several municipal broadband failures and made recommendations about how more Tennesseans can adopt broadband services. Of particular interest, the report noted, is finding ways to provide broadband access to Tennessee's rural areas.

Tennessee currently ranks 29th in the country for broadband access, with 13 percent of the state lacking accessibility. While only 2 percent of the state's urban citizens lack access, 34 percent of rural residents are without coverage, placing them at a distinct disadvantage over their city counterparts.

House Bill 529 addresses broadband accessibility and adoption through business investment and deregulation. Coupled with the state budget, the legislation makes targeted state investments through grants and tax credits that focus on the state's unserved areas. The legislation also permits the state's private, nonprofit electric cooperatives to provide retail broadband service — something they have been completely unable to do in the past.

In addition, the legislation encourages training and assistance, as well as grant funding for education opportunities at the state's local libraries to help residents improve digital literacy skills, which will maximize the benefits of broadband.

House Bill 529 will be heard in the full Business and Utilities Committee next week.

Resolution To Honor Blind Citizens, American History Receives Committee Approval

This month, the House State Government Subcommittee approved legislation to honor Tennessee's blind citizens as well as American history by passing House Joint Resolution 88.

As approved by the committee, the legislation calls for a braille American flag to be displayed in the new Cordell Hull legislative office building, which the General Assembly is set to move into later this year.

Randolph Cabral, founder of the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, created the braille flag to honor his father, Jesus Sanchez Cabral. Jesus Sanchez Cabral was a decorated U.S. Army Air

Corps veteran who served the United States during World War II. Glaucoma robbed him of his sight 10 years before his death. It also hampered Cabral's ability to post and fly the American flag on his front porch, a duty he cherished as a patriotic veteran.

The braille American flag serves as a valuable teaching and learning aid for instructing blind students about its place in American history. It is composed of braille figures in the upper left corner that represent the stars of the 50 states. They are arranged in nine rows of alternating clusters. The long smooth horizontal lines represent the red stripes. Each red stripe is lined with the appropriate braille dots to indicate the stripe's color. The long raised textured areas on the flag represent the white stripes. They are also lined with the appropriate braille dots to indicate the stripe's color.

The American braille flag is a powerful symbol for more than 30 million blind and low vision Americans. In 2008, the United States Congress authorized its placement at Arlington National Cemetery as a tribute to blind veterans. It is displayed by thousands of sighted and blind civilians, veterans, hospitals, memorial parks, elected officials, schools for the blind, and many other places.

Department Of Environment & Conservation Announces Open Registration For Third Annual Transportation Awards And Forum

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Transportation and Tennessee Clean Fuels, announced this week they will hold the third annual Tennessee Transportation Awards and Forum during Clean Air Month from May 23-24 at the Nashville Public Library.

The event will bring together state experts, local leaders, and community members to discuss successes and challenges facing transportation in Tennessee.

The forum, entitled "Navigating Toward a Livable Tennessee," will highlight local transportation planning and the pursuit of policies and investments for improved transportation options in our communities. The keynote address will be delivered by Russ Brooks, Smart Cities Director at Transportation for America, an organization focused on supporting the development of smart, sustainable, and locally driven transportation policies across the United States.

An awards luncheon will be held on the second day of the forum, and will include remarks from TDEC Commissioner Bob Martineau and Tennessee Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner Toks Omishakin. The awards recognize outstanding initiatives to improve the efficiency, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of transportation systems in the state, consistent with ongoing efforts to improve the health and well-being of Tennesseans, provide for a strong economy, and protect our state's natural resources.

To register for the event, visit <https://goo.gl/QNcfqm>.

March 8 Commemorates Legislative Joint Convention With Elvis

Fifty-six years ago, on March 8, 1961, history was made on the floor of the House of Representatives. At 11am that day, the hour set by 1961 Senate Joint Resolution 52, the Senate joined the House in the House Chamber for a Joint Convention.

Elvis Presley was then escorted into the Chamber to address the members of the General Assembly, along with an overflow crowd of guests.

Prior to Elvis's introduction, Speaker of the Senate William Baird understated, "The House Chamber is quite crowded."

The Speaker is then famously heard to say, "If any lady faints, please let Elvis catch her."

This is not the only connection between Elvis and the General Assembly. One of the paramedics who attended to Elvis at the time of his death in August 1977 was Ulysses Jones, Jr. In November 1987, Ulysses Jones was elected to represent the 98th District for the 95th General Assembly, a seat he held until his passing in November 2010.