



Capitol Report March 5, 2021

Weekly Overview: Monday of this week (3/1) was the last day in the House and Senate to file legislation and legislators filed 220 additional bills, bringing the total number of bills filed in the House and Senate this session to 2,214.

This week the Missouri Senate worked on legislation that would create a time limit on lawsuits over injuries from defective or unsafe products. The fifteen year time limitation would not apply to situations where manufacturers knowingly concealed defects or negligence. The Senate debated the bill for several hours before laying it over on the Senate Informal Calendar. The Senate was able to send a bill over to the House which would place limitations on the use of tax increment financing in areas designated as flood plains. See the full provisions of the bill [here](#).

The House passed and sent a number of bills to the Senate for consideration. Of note, [HB 52](#) offered by Rep. Schnelting would allow people with the proper permit to conceal carry on public transit systems. Another [bill](#) that passed would allow the Department of Labor to forgive non-fraudulent overpayments of unemployment benefits granted through the CARES Act or other federal programs designed to provide unemployment relief. This bill is not without controversy as Governor Parson has not yet signed off on the idea. The House also worked on [HB 75](#) which is designed to limit the power of local officials to impose health orders. The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Murphy (R-St. Louis), was filed in response to the outcry from businesses and churches that were shuttered over the last 12 months because of COVID-19 restrictions. This bill was Perfected in the House this week and will be sent to the Senate early next week.

We are expecting a very busy week next week as the Legislative Spring break will begin upon adjournment of session next Thursday. We expect long days of floor activity as members push to have their legislation pass from its originating chamber before the break begins. When the House and Senate return from break on March 22nd there will be 8 weeks left in the legislative session and only 6 weeks before the constitutionally mandated budget deadline.

In the news...

- Citing the federal pandemic stimulus funding by Congress, State Senator Lincoln Hough (R-Springfield) filed a bill on Monday that proposes the largest single tax cut in Missouri's history. The bill, SB 627, reduces that top rate of income tax by 0.5% beginning in 2022 from 5.3% to 4.8%. Hough said that Missourians should be able to retain more of their hard earned money, especially in light of the pandemic.
- Approximately 500,000 Missourians have completed the vaccination regime. Additionally, it was announced that Missouri would receive 50,000 doses of the newly authorized Johnson & Johnson vaccine this week.
- On March 2, St. Louis voters chose City Treasurer Tishaura Jones and Alderwoman Cara Spencer as their two top choices for a mayoral runoff election. This is the first time in the City's history to utilize "approval voting" to select candidates in a primary election. That system of voting allows voters to vote for as many candidates as they wish, with the top two victors to run in the general election on April 6. In addition to Jones and Spencer, Aldermanic President Lewis Reed and businessman Andrew Jones were on Tuesday's ballot.
- The *Missouri Independent* reports this week that \$1.6 billion in the state budget designated to implement Medicaid expansion to approximately 275,000 newly eligible recipients has been segregated into a new and separate appropriation bill. MI reporter Rudy Keller writes that the move "The move has Democrats wondering if House Republicans are looking for a way to avoid funding the new health care program and a leading Senate Republican suggesting it may be a path to renewing legal challenges to expansion". As filed by House Budget Chairman Cody Smith (R-Carthage), the bill would appropriate \$103.5 million in general revenue, \$51.5 in other state funds and \$1.4 billion in federal matching funds to implement the program expansion approved by Missouri voters last August.

BUDGET UPDATE: This was a busy week for the House Budget Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee. The Senate completed the department budget presentations with the Governor's recommendations. The House Budget Sub-Committees completed the initial budget mark-up process by submitting their recommendations to the full Budget Committee. It will now be up to Chairman Cody Smith (R-Carthage) to decide to accept or reject the recommendations. Next week it is expected the full budget committee will begin drafting their amendments for submission to the chairman. The full House Committee on Budget will not begin their mark-up until after the General Assembly returns from Spring Break. The sub-committee recommendations are as follows:

- A decrease of \$3,643,829 to the School Broadband Core to fund Independent Living Centers (\$300,000); Community Colleges (\$2.5 million); repair of Missouri Western University's Scanlon Hall (\$643,829); and Missouri Scholars and Fine Arts Academies (\$200,000),

- A decrease of \$500,000 to the Fast Track Program to fund Community Colleges (\$500,000),
- A decrease of \$500,000 to the Fast Track Program to fund the Lincoln University Land Grant Match Program (\$500,000),
- An additional \$10 million in authority from the medical marijuana program to be dedicated to Veteran's Services,
- A decrease of \$447,977 to the cost-share road program to fund SEMA Task Force 1 (\$100,000) and restore the Director's Office Salary cut (\$347,977),

A decrease of \$47 million to the bridge repair program (there appears to be confusion on this recommendation as Director McKenna stated there is no excess authority to cut and the funds have already been dedicated to projects).

HOUSE ELEM AND SECONDARY ED

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to discuss HB 320, sponsored by Representative Travis Fitzwater (R-Holts Summit). The bill modifies the definition of "computer science course" to include both a stand-alone computer course in the elementary, middle, and high school levels or any course that embeds computer science content within other subjects. [Code.org](#), KC Tech Council, Greater St. Louis Inc. and MO Chamber of Commerce supported the bill. UM System opposed the bill, advocating for the removal of mathematics provisions.

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to discuss HB 494, sponsored by Representative Josh Hurlbert (R). The bill prohibits public school membership in any statewide activities association that prohibits home school students from participating in any event or activity offered by the school district in which the student resides. Numerous homeschool students gathered together to support the legislation. MO Alliance for Arts Education, along with Christian Home Education Fellowship opposed the bill

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to discuss HB 541, sponsored by Representative Ed Lewis (R). The bill requires DESE to annually publish on their website a list of schools performing in the bottom 5% of schools for more than three years. No supporting testimony was presented during the hearing. MO School Board Association and AFT MO opposed the bill.

Early Learning Quality Assurance Program

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to discuss HB 1071, sponsored by Representative Brenda Shields (R-St. Joseph). Currently, the Early Learning Quality Assurance Pilot Program is set to expire in 2022. The bill removes the sunset date to establish the program as a permanent program in the State. During bill presentation, the sponsor highlighted the benefits of the program and stated the program was created in 2017 as a pilot program in an attempt to expand and improve the quality of early learning and parent education programs that support young children and families for success in Missouri. Aligned, Kids Win MO, and MO Coalition of

Children's Agencies supported the bill. No opposing testimony was provided during the hearing.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to consider passage of HB 164, sponsored by Representative Rudy Veit (R). The bill allows school districts to divide into subdistricts. During committee discussion, substitute language was adopted to establish guidelines if enough school board member do not apply and also establishes if a school board member does not do something, this substitute establishes a provision if 10% of the voters from the previous election file a petition, it goes through an initiative petition process to be delivered to the school board for a vote. Once modified, the committee passed the bill by a 16-0 vote.

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to consider passage of HB 229, sponsored by Representative Chuck Basye (R). The bill establishes procedures for school board member recall elections. During committee discussion, two amendments were adopted, the first changes the initial part of a recall from 30 days to 90 days once in office. The second, includes a definition involving the term moral turpitude. Once modified, the committee passed the bill by an 11-6 vote.

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to consider passage of HB 754, sponsored by Representative Phil Christofanelli (R). The bill modifies provisions related to the virtual school program. During committee discussion, substitute language was adopted to address the SAT amount for tuition, to allow the full amount of the Students full amount of ADA, \$6300 dollars. Once modified, the committee passed the bill by an 11-6 vote.

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to consider passage of HJR 47, sponsored by Representative Dottie Bailey (R). Upon voter approval, this resolution proposes amending the Missouri Constitution to change the state board of education (SBE) from being appointed by the Governor to a board elected at the same time as the next presidential election. After brief discussion, the committee passed the resolution by a narrow 9-8 vote.

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met Tuesday morning to consider passage of HB 253, sponsored by Representative Craig Fishel (R). This bill modifies the election process for school board members for any school district in which a majority of the district is located in any home rule city with more than 155,000 but fewer than 200,000 inhabitants. Currently this refers to the Springfield Public School District. After brief discussion, the committee passed the bill by a 11-6 vote.

-End of Report-