



Legislative Update

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REGISTER NOW TO ATTEND YOUR REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE FORUM!

Missouri NEA's regional legislative events began for 2020 with the Kansas City Regional Legislative Forum on January 30. These free events will provide a chance for members to build relationships with area legislators and support their understanding of MNEA priorities and education issues. Plan to attend and invite fellow members, administrators and school board members who would enjoy and benefit from a discussion regarding support for public education!

LEGISLATIVE FORUM SCHEDULE:

St. Louis Legislative Forum	February 13
Jefferson County/Southeast Legislative Forum	February 27
Mid-Missouri Legislative Forum	March 5

PLEASE REGISTER NOW for your regional MNEA Legislative Forum at

<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PoliticalAction/5.aspx>

Be sure to click through the "RSVP now" link for your event and then "Send RSVP" to register. For additional information contact Sandy Smith (sandy.smith@mnea.org).

GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENTS

The Senate confirmed the appointment of Sen. Gary Romine as a member of the State Tax Commission on January 30. The Association thanks Sen. Romine for his years of public service and his leadership on public education issues as a member of the Senate and as Chair of the Senate Education Committee.

Sen. Romine is the third Senator to receive an appointment from Governor Parson and leave office since session began on January 8. Sen. Kiki Curls resigned to accept an appointment as a member of the Labor and Industrial Relations Commission and Sen. Jason Holsman accepted an appointment to the Public Service Commission. The Association thanks all three Senators for their support of students and public education.

The loss of these members from the Senate means that more will be required from the remaining advocates for public education in the Senate. This loss will also require more engagement from Association members in support of those advocates who remain in office.

SENATE DEBATES ATTACKS ON THE REFORMS OF CLEAN MISSOURI

The Senate debated SJR 38 (Hegeman) on January 29 for about ten hours before the measure was laid over on the Informal Calendar. Sen. Hegeman offered two Senate Substitute (SS) versions. SJR 38 was laid over with SS#2 and an amendment pending. The SS#2 removes fairness and competitiveness as redistricting criteria. SJR 38 is similar to HJR 76 and HJR 101 and would reverse the redistricting reforms of Amendment 1, also known as CLEAN Missouri. The Association strongly opposes SJR 38.

SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION

The Senate General Laws Committee heard SB 649 (Eigel) on January 28 and then proceeded to immediately vote to approve the bill. The bill would allow charter schools to be sponsored by outside entities (other than the local school board) and operate in districts around the state. The bill is likely to be reported to the floor soon and could be taken up for debate in the coming weeks.

Guided by the revised MNEA Position Paper on charter schools, the Association believes that charter schools should be sponsored by and accountable to the local community through the elected school board and approved only after an impact study is conducted by the district to consider the proposal. Existing charter schools should move to district sponsorship when their charters come up for renewal. Charter schools should be subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, parents and staff as are applicable to traditional public schools. SB 649 does not enact these reforms, and the Association opposes the bill.

SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES TAX CREDIT VOUCHER BILL

The Senate Ways and Means Committee voted to approved SCS/SB 581 (Cierpiot) on January 30. The bill would create a tax credit voucher program for low and middle income students that would be housed in the State Treasurer's Office. The bill has relatively few details about how the program would operate and contains essentially no requirements on the private schools that might receive funding under the measure. The Association believes that private school option plans compromise free, equitable, universal and quality public education for every student and opposes the bill.

EDUCATOR TAX DEDUCTION

The Senate Ways and Means Committee voted to approve SCS/SB 583 (Arthur) on January 30. The bill would allow for a state income tax deduction for educator expenses. The vast majority of public school teachers purchase school supplies for students out of their personal funds and these purchases are not typically reimbursed by the district. The Association supports the bill.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCE (TIF) REFORM

The Senate gave final approval (Third Reading vote) to SS/SCS/SB 570 (Koenig) on January 30. The bill makes several changes regarding tax increment finance (TIF) projects. Most notably, an amendment offered by Sen. Arthur will allow a school district to vote, by a two-thirds vote, to exclude the school district's operating levy from a TIF financing project. The Association supports this effort to improve TIF regulations by better defining and focusing the situations where TIFs can apply and ensuring a third party does the evaluation of whether the proposed project meets those definitions, rather than the developers.

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

The Senate gave first round approval to SS/SB 528 (Cunningham) on January 28. The bill requires DESE to transfer any excess foundation formula funding to fund pupil transportation. The SS changes the distribution of funds to be based on upon transportation costs, rather than the number of students transported. Currently, excess formula funding reverts to general revenue and does not benefit public schools. The Association supports this as a step to improve funding for public schools. Pupil transportation is only funded by the state at about 15% of districts' allowed costs, while the law calls for up to 75% state funding of allowed cost, leaving schools about \$200 million short in state reimbursement.

DRUG RECOVERY CHARTER SCHOOL

The Senate Government Reform Committee heard SB 525 (Emery) on January 28. The bill would authorize a specific charter high school to be created in the Kansas City school district to serve students recovering from substance use or substance dependency. The bill would give the school the ability to enroll non-resident pupils from other districts in the state and possibly from Kansas if that state provides the per pupil funding for the student. The Association is concerned that such a program may be better established as a traditional public school due to issues with the current charter law. If created as a charter school, it should be sponsored by the local school board following a determination that it will best serve the needs of students and will improve the school system.

HOUSE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The committee heard two bills on January 28:

1) HB 1347 (Baker) to change the restrictions on expenditure of public funds to support or oppose candidates and certain measures. The hearing on this bill is held over from last week. The bill actually purports to restrict the ability of school employees and other public employees to testify for or against a bill pending before the legislature, even when doing so on their own time as a citizen. The Association believes this bill clearly violates the free speech rights of school employees and other public employees and opposes the bill.

2) HB 1903 (Shields) to provide additional state aid for school districts that share superintendents.

The committee also voted to approve two bills on January 28:

1) HB 1317 (Sommer) to require districts to identify and provide services and programs for gifted children. The Association supports the bill.

2) HCS/HB 1568 (Bailey) regarding seclusion and restraint policies in public schools. The bill defines seclusion and restraint, requires parental notice if either seclusion or restraint is used on a student and contains extensive reporting requirements on the incident. The Association is concerned that wording of the bill may cause even technical violations of the bill to constitute child abuse under state law. The Association will work to resolve this issue and to ensure that the bill allows school boards to maintain a policy that respects the safety and dignity of both students and staff.

COLLEGE WORK STUDY

The House Higher Education Committee heard HB 1430 (Kendrick) on January 27. The bill establishes a work-study program within the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development. The Association believes the bill will expand opportunities for college students to have work-study employment opportunities while attending the institution and supports the bill.

INITIATIVE PETITION PROCESS

The Senate Local Government and Elections Committee voted to approve two measures regarding the initiative petition process on January 29:

1) SJR 31 (Sater) to require petitions to amend the Constitution to be signed by 15% of the legal voters in each of all eight Congressional districts. SJR 31 also requires a two-thirds majority for issues brought by petition to be adopted, except for petitions to repeal an amendment adopted through the initiative petition process prior to December 2020. The Association is concerned that the joint resolution will effectively make it impossible for citizens to bring forward policies via petition. The Association opposes SJR 31.

2) SB 522 (Sater) to modify laws pertaining to the initiative and referendum process. The bill imposes a \$500 filing fee on every filed proposal, along with a surcharge of \$25 per page over ten pages. The fee is refunded if the measure is certified for distribution. The bill also provides that all previously collected signatures are invalidated if a court orders a change to the ballot title. The Association is concerned that the bill will create barriers that make it harder for citizens to bring forward policies via petition.

The House Elections and Elected Officials Committee heard two measures regarding initiative petitions on January 29:

HJR 63 (Billington) to require signature collection for initiative petitions to meet signature thresholds in all eight Congressional Districts of the state, rather than the current requirement of at least six of eight Congressional Districts. This requirement would make an already difficult task much harder to complete. The Association opposes HJR 60 and believes the measure would make it harder and more costly for citizens to bring forward relevant policies through the initiative process.

HJR 97 (Eggleston) to require the sponsor of any initiative petition proposing Constitutional amendments to collect signatures in every Congressional district and then to submit any approved petition to the General Assembly for consideration in a manner similar to a bill. The legislature would be allowed to interfere with the process by passing, amending or blocking the petition. Only a petition approved by the legislature could be approved by a simple majority. Any version not approved by the legislature would have to be approved by a two-thirds supermajority.

Again, the Association believes that this makes it harder for citizens to bring forward and enact relevant policies. Since the formation of the state nearly 200 years ago, each of Missouri's four Constitutions and all amendments thereto have been adopted by simple majority vote and no measure brought forward by the people has been subject to the interference and approval of the legislature. Indeed, Article III, Section 49 of the Missouri Constitution declares that the people reserve this power to themselves: "The people reserve power to propose and enact or reject laws and amendments to the constitution by the initiative, independent of the general assembly, and also reserve power to approve or reject by referendum any act of the general assembly, except as hereinafter provided."

USEFUL LINKS

MNEA Issues and Action: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/Issues-Action.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Action Center: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/LegislativeActionCenter.aspx>

MNEA Education Advocates Program (includes signup):
<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PoliticalActionProgram.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Forums (includes signup):
<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PoliticalAction/5.aspx>

MNEA Capitol Action Days (includes signup):
<http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/CapitolActionDays.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Updates (includes signup):
<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/StateLegislativeUpdates.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Platform and Priorities: <https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PlatformPriorities.aspx>

MNEA App: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/News/Download-the-Missouri-NEA-Mobile-App-Today-413.aspx>

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