



Legislative Update

By Otto Fajen
MNEA Legislative Director
Otto.fajen@mnea.org

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SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE APPROVES TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS AND CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION

The committee voted to approve SCS/SBs 55, 25 and 23 (O'Laughlin) on January 21 by a 5-4 vote. Senators Arthur, Gannon, Razer and Schupp voted in opposition. The SCS contains the following provisions:

- 1) Tax credit style voucher provisions (from SB 23 and SB 25) that would divert public funds to finance private school tuition. The SCS raises the annual cap to \$100 million, allows the annual cap to increase by 10% per year and removes the special education requirement for participating students. Missouri NEA opposes these and similar proposals to divert public funds to private schools not subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, staff and parents as apply to public schools.
- 2) Expanded sponsorship of charter schools by outside entities (from SB 25) in many regions around the state. Missouri NEA opposes this provision and believes that charter schools should be sponsored by and accountable to the local school board. Charter schools should be authorized or expanded only after a district has assessed the impact of the proposed charter school on local public school resources, programs and services. Also, charter schools should be subject to the same standards of transparency and accountability as are applicable to district public schools.
- 3) MSHSAA activity eligibility for all home school students, required under threat of loss of state aid to public schools participating in MSHSAA. The Association believes that educators should continue to make decisions concerning the activities of member schools and opposed the bill.
- 4) Provisions to allow for school board member recall.
- 5) Creating term limits of a single, eight-year term for State Board of Education members.
- 6) Separation of full-time MOCAP virtual students from any connection to their home school district. The Association believes that publicly funded virtual course students should be enrolled in a public school that is accountable to the local school district and able to support and monitor student engagement and success.

The Association strongly opposes SCS/SBs 55, 25 and 23.

While the SCS version of SB 55 has not been reported to the floor, the bill is on a fast track for action and could come to the Senate floor for debate as soon as next week. Stay tuned to the MNEA Legislative Update for further information as these bills advance.

HOUSE SCHEDULED TO RESUME SESSION NEXT WEEK

The House cancelled session activities for this week. House leaders noted that a number of members and staff have test positive for COVID-19. However, House committee meetings and floor session are scheduled for next week.

HOUSE COMMITTEE TO HEAR TAX CREDIT VOUCHER BILLS NEXT WEEK

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee will meet on January 26 to hear two tax credit style voucher bills: HB 288 (Christofanelli) and HB 540 (Fitzwater). HB 288 is a companion bill to SB 23 and the voucher portion of SB 25. HB 540 is a tax credit style voucher that puts some program administration under the control of the State Treasurer. Missouri NEA opposes these and similar proposals to divert public funds to private schools not subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, staff and parents as apply to public schools.

The committee will also hear HB 288 (Basye) to allow parents of special education students to make audio recordings of IEP meetings and 504 plan meetings with prior notice.

LOCAL CONTROL OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

The Senate Health and Pensions Committee heard a number of bills pertaining to local control of public health measures on January 20, including SB 12 (Onder), SB 20 (Hoskins), SB 21 (Koenig), SB 31 (Cierpiot), and SB 56 (O'Laughlin). The Association believes that every child should have a safe place to learn. The Association urges the committee to ensure that any such legislation maintain an effective structure in place, where local and state public health officials can take appropriate and timely action to adopt and enforce provisions to help ensure students have safe schools.

SENATE COMMITTEE HEARS COVID LIABILITY BILLS

The Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee heard SB 51 (Luetkemeyer) and SB 42 (White) on January 19. Both bills pertain to liability protections for employers and other entities during declared emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Association has concerns regarding this type of sweeping liability waiver and opposes both bills as filed. Fundamentally, if no one is responsible, no one is safe. Among several concerns, the products liability waiver could put educators and many other workers at risk of using ineffective, inadequate or unsafe products if manufacturers have no responsibility to maintain high product standards during the pandemic.

SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

The committee will meet on January 21 to hear two bills:

SB 22 (Koenig) regarding tax increment finance (TIF) projects. The bill would better define and focus the situations where TIFs can apply and ensure that a third party does the evaluation of whether the proposed project meets those definitions, rather than the developers. The Association supports the bill.

SB 24 (Eigel) to permanently eliminate 99.997% of the taxes on personal property within a five year period. by phasing out. Based on the official fiscal note for the bill, this change is expected to ultimately reduce local school revenues by roughly \$1 billion per year. The Association opposes the bill.

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Missouri National Education Association
1810 East Elm Street
Jefferson City, MO 65101-4174
(573) 634-3202 or (800) 392-0236
www.mnea.org

Phil Murray, President
DeeAnn Aull, Executive Director
Otto Fajen, Legislative Director
Sandy Smith, Administrative Assistant