



# Legislative Update

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## HOUSE-ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The committee heard four bills on January 25:

HB 1585 (Murphy) to require public schools to teach students the responsible use of social media.

HB 1903 (Christofanelli) to modify provisions related to the virtual school program. There are significant concerns with the language as filed, and the Association opposes the bill. The bill removes important safeguards for students, including the role of the resident district in the decision to enroll and in monitoring student progress.

HB 2306 (Christofanelli) to move school board elections to the November general election. The Association is concerned that moving school board elections to November will reduce the ability of voters to focus on the local issues of the school board during the hectic, partisan November general election. Voter attention will be drawn to the many offices higher up on the ballot. Also, the available public and media attention will be taken up by those higher office races, leaving less time, less access and less attention on school boards and school issues. The Association opposes the bill.

HJR 110 (Christofanelli) to propose a constitutional amendment relating, at least in part, to parental involvement with public schools. The joint resolution includes several provisions relating to the right of parents to direct their children's education. However, the resolution also includes sweeping changes regarding access to other information, including labor contract negotiations. These negotiations are of a public interest and already dealt with as needed in the open records law. This provision does not relate solely to the parental role in education. The Association opposes this unneeded and sweeping change to a policy that is working well.

In addition to hearing bills, the committee voted to approve two bills:

1) HCS/HB 1747 (Basye) creates a process for recalling school board members. The HCS exempts the governing board of the Special School District of St. Louis County from the recall provision. The bill also allows lawsuits to seek to require school employees and officials to perform actions required by school law. The Association is concerned that this new language could subject school employees to frivolous lawsuits and opposes the bill.

2) HCS/HB 2304 (Lewis) to create a state law establishing qualifications for substitute teachers that is similar to the State Board rule. The HCS includes language to include a three-year waiver of the 550 hour/50% earnings limit for working after retirement. The HCS also includes a provision for DESE to

establish an anonymous, online survey tool for substitute teachers that will help collect relevant data regarding the pay, support, and experiences of substitute teachers across the state. The HCS also includes an emergency clause.

## **SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The committee met on January 25 to hear four bills:

SB 648 (Rowden) to modify provisions related to the virtual school program. This bill is the same as HB 1903 (Christofanelli) and presents the same concerns with the language as filed. The Association opposes the bill. The bill removes important safeguards for students, including the role of the resident district in the decision to enroll and in monitoring student progress.

SB 657 (Cierpiot) to establish procedures for recall elections for school board members. Unlike HB 1747 (Bayse), this bill contains no new provisions to authorize lawsuits against school staff and school officials.

SB 662 (Arthur) to provide for school innovation waivers to exempt schools from specific requirements imposed by statute or regulation. The Association believes this bill could be used to grant flexibility to improve pupil assessments and supports the bill.

SB 681 (O'Laughlin) to modify provisions related to literacy and reading instruction. The bill repeals retention in grade requirements for struggling readers and requires assessment and intervention beginning in kindergarten. The bill requires systematic and explicit interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia. The Association believes that reading instruction, with appropriate evidence-based reading intervention, especially in the early grades, is essential for learning and achieving high standards in all content areas. The committee appears likely to consider a substitute bill that contains many provisions from SB 1076 (Arthur), a somewhat similar bill filed last week.

## **HOUSE-HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The committee heard two bills on January 24:

HB 1723 (Shields) regarding the A+ Schools scholarships. The bill would allow A+ students who earn an associate degree or the equivalent to apply A+ scholarship funds toward earning a bachelor's degree if the student has used less than \$10,000 in A+ funds for the associate degree or the equivalent up to a total of \$15,000.

HB 1724 (Hudson) regarding policies of public higher education institutions in recognizing student association. The bill would prevent a public college from limiting recognition to belief-based student associations that require leaders to adhere to its beliefs, practice requirements or standards of conduct. The Association believes that organizations are strengthened by offering memberships on a nondiscriminatory basis. The Association opposes the bill as filed.

## **SCHOOL RETIREMENT**

The House Pensions Committee heard HB 2114 (Rusty Black) on January 26. The bill would revise PSRS working after retirement provisions. The bill extends time a retiree may use the critical shortage provision from two years to four years. The bill also increases the amount a PSRS retiree may earn working in a PEERS position from \$15,000 per year to the Social Security earnings limit, currently

\$19,560. The Association supports the bill and believes the critical shortage position can be improved to better allow PSRS retirees to help when needed. Improvements could include increasing the allowed number of shortage positions as a percentage in larger districts, allowing immediate employment on a temporary basis when needed and allowing positions to be advertised on a public website created to post available positions.

## **PARTISAN SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS**

The House General Laws Committee heard HB 1611 (Sassman) on January 24. The bill requires candidates for office in political subdivisions, including school boards, to declare a political party affiliation and for that affiliation to be printed on the ballot. The Association is concerned that requiring party affiliation will create an unneeded focus on those issues that are of interest to political parties, even if those issues aren't relevant to the primary work of school boards. This change is unneeded and will distract school board candidates and the voting public from the most important functions for the school board to accomplish. The Association opposes the bill.

## **INITIATIVE PETITIONS**

The House Elections and Elected Officials Committee heard three joint resolutions on January 26. HJR 70 (Davidson), HJR 71 (Davidson) and HJR 102 (Evans) would each make it harder for citizens to use the initiative petition process in the future, and the Association opposes these measures.

## **PROPERTY ASSESSMENT CAPS**

The Senate Ways and Means Committee heard two measures on January 27 that would allow certain property assessments to be limited.

SJR 39 (Luetkemeyer) would propose a constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters, would allow the growth of property assessed values to be limited by law. SB 680 (Luetkemeyer) is implementing legislation that would place a limit on the growth in assessments of residential real property, should SJR 39 be passed by the legislature and approved by voters.

The Association is concerned that these two measures would cause certain properties to artificially be assessed below actual values according to which other properties are assessed. This would create two problems: first, the reduced assessments would reduce local property tax revenues which help fund public schools and other essential local services. Second, this change would undermine the basic constitutional provision that taxes shall be uniform. This could undermine public confidence regarding the fairness of the property tax system.

The committee also voted to approve SB 701 (Moon) to eliminate the corporate income tax and SB 739 (Eigel) to reduce the top rate of income tax. While the state is currently flush with cash due to an influx of federal stimulus funds and high state revenues from an economy benefitting from federal funds to the private sector, these bills would enact significant and permanent tax cuts that will reduce the state's long term capacity to fund public education and other vital services. The Association opposes both bills.

## **HOUSE-WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The committee heard HB 2325 (Patterson) on January 24. The bill would establish the "Workforce Diploma Program" that would create a new adult high school and industry credential program through DESE.

## **HOUSE-SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON URBAN ISSUES**

The committee heard HB 1743 (Dogan) and HB 2185 (Proudie) on January 24. These substantially similar bills would prohibit certain discriminatory practices based on hair texture and protective hairstyles.

## **COVID AND VACCINES**

The House-Judiciary Committee will meet on January 25 to hear nineteen bills relating primarily to COVID and vaccine requirements. Among these bills, HB 1635 (Seitz) is so broadly and vaguely worded that it may overwrite and negate the existing law requiring public school students to be immunized against specified, harmful diseases. The Association is concerned that this unneeded change will threaten the health of students and staff in schools and opposes the bill.

## **CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING**

The Senate Select Committee on Redistricting heard HCS/HB 2117 (Shaul) on January 25 and then voted to approve the bill the same day. The Senate debated the bill on January 26 but did not bring the bill to a vote. The House approved the bill last week but failed to adopt the emergency clause. The emergency clause would allow the bill to go into effect by the date of the primary election. Without approval of the emergency clause, the bill becomes effective on August 28.

The bill would update Missouri's eight Congressional districts, based upon the 2020 U.S. Census data that was released last year. The legislature revises Congressional districts every ten years by enacting a bill that specifies those new districts. With candidate filing beginning in late February and ending in late March, candidates will want to know what the district boundaries are before that filing window closes.

HCS/HB 2117 is regarded as a "6-2" map, meaning that, like the current map, historical voting performance would maintain a 6-2 split in the Republican and Democratic Party makeup of Missouri's delegation to Congress. Several floor amendments were offered, but none were approved.

The map for the House version of the bill can be viewed at:

<https://house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills221/maps/Map.4875H.02P.pdf>

### **Legislative Update 2022**

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