

## ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

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There has been no announcement on session dates for January 2021 or the spring 2021 session. Both chambers are expected to meet for a lame duck session before January 13. Once the legislators are sworn in on January 13 for the 102<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, there cannot be any business until legislative leaders for each caucus are elected.

During a closed session of the Illinois House Black Caucus forum to hear from candidates for Speaker for the next General Assembly, the *Chicago Sun-Times* managed to listen in to Speaker Michael Madigan's reelection pitch. According to the *Sun-Times*, Madigan said "The strong leadership I provided against the Rauner program is the same leadership that I pledge to provide to the caucus on state finances and on redistricting." He added he will push for an increase in the flat income tax if Gov. Pritzker requests it, which he said was "very possible." "My desire, my request, is to get the endorsement of the Black Caucus and then, from that, move on to build toward 60, but it's a persuasion process," Madigan said, according to the *Sun-Times*. Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, the only other announced candidate for the job, also made her case. Madigan received the official endorsement on Wednesday, but he is at least six votes short of the 60 he needs. Rep. Maurice West, the only member of the Black Caucus to announce he won't vote for Madigan, hasn't changed his position.

Six Illinois House Democrats penned a letter pleading with their 19 colleagues to "come together as a family" and "unite for a common purpose." The group argued the caucus needs to unite to advance their significant agenda, which includes addressing systemic racism, a massive state budget hole caused by a stalled economy due to the pandemic, drawing the legislative maps, an environmental package, property taxes, and ethics reforms. The letter doesn't directly call on the 19 lawmakers to flip back to support Madigan, but that is certainly the implication. The letter was signed by six Madigan-aligned state representatives: Michael Zalewski, D-Riverside, Frances Hurley, D-Chicago, John D'Amico, D-Chicago, Nick Smith, D-Chicago, Justin Slaughter, D-Chicago, and Mike Halpin, D-Rock Island.

Asked about Madigan's comments to the Black Caucus to increase the flat tax during the daily COVID-19 press conference, Governor J.B. Pritzker reiterated he wants to start with cuts. Pritzker's comments prompted House GOP Leader Jim Durkin to call on the governor to release plans for spending cuts. And then Senate President Don Harmon, through his spokesperson, called on Republicans to offer cuts, since "Republicans made it clear deep budget cuts were a better alternative to a Fair Tax."

Over the weekend, Illinois Republican Party Chairman Tim Schneider announced he was giving up his position. While there are a lot of interested individuals to replace Schneider, including chief of staff to former Gov. Rauner Richard Goldberg, party leaders are conducting an open search.

State Rep. John Cabello (R-Rockford) is seeking a recount after his narrow defeat to Dave Vella. Final election results give Democrat challenger Vella a 239-vote lead after 53,301 votes were cast in Rockford and Winnebago counties. Cabello on Friday filed paperwork with the Rockford Board of Elections asking for a recount in 10 Rockford precincts located inside six different wards.

The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus elected Rep. Sonya Harper (D-Chicago) as Joint Caucus Chair. Harper succeeds Senate Majority Leader Kimberly Lightford. Also elected to the joint Black Caucus leadership

team: Sen. Emil Jones will be treasurer, newly elected Rep. Lakesia Collins is secretary, and Rep. Curtis Tarver II is sergeant-at-arms. All are Democrats. Separately, the Senate Black Caucus elected Sen. Robert Peters as its chair. Both caucuses are laser focused on passing the Black Agenda. The legislative package encompassing four pillars – (1) criminal justice reform; (2) education and workforce development; (3) economic access, equity, and opportunity; and (4) health care and human services – has not yet been filed for review.

Former state Senator Martin Sandoval, who had been hospitalized after contracting COVID-19, died on Saturday. He was 56 years old. Sandoval's death comes 11 months after he pleaded guilty to charges of bribery and filing a false tax return for his role in a scheme involving the SafeSpeed red light camera company. Sandoval's criminal defense attorney wrote in a statement that Sandoval was trying to make amends for his mistakes by cooperating with prosecutors. Legal experts suggest Sandoval's death has the potential to complicate federal corruption investigations.

### **COVID-19 Update**

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today reported 9,420 new confirmed and probable cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Illinois, including 190 additional deaths. Currently, IDPH is reporting a total of 832,951 cases, including 14,050 deaths. Within the past 24 hours, laboratories have reported 104,448 specimens for a total 11,586,296. As of last night, 5,141 in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 1,081 patients were in the ICU and 635 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators.

The preliminary seven-day statewide positivity for cases as a percent of total test from December 4 – December 10, 2020 is 9.4%. The seven-day average dipped below 10% Tuesday for the first time in more than a month.

All information pertaining to the Coronavirus Response from the Governor's office and agencies can be found [here](#). DCEO regularly updates its [Frequently Asked Questions document \(available via this link\)](#).

The new COVID-19 surge is hitting Illinois' most vulnerable residents harder than ever, with a record 480 deaths recorded last week among people living in long-term care facilities.

The initial delivery of vaccines to prevent COVID-19 in Illinois will be distributed among the 50 counties with the highest death rates per capita. Officials are expecting an opening shipment of 109,000 vaccine doses as early as next week. While hundreds of thousands more are expected in subsequent weeks. The vaccines will be shipped to ten regional hospital centers which will then coordinate distribution to these counties:

Bureau, Carroll, Cass, Christian, Clark, Clay, Clinton, Coles, Cumberland, Dewitt, DuPage, Fayette, Ford, Greene, Iroquois, Jasper, Jefferson, Jersey, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kankakee, Knox, Lake, La Salle, Macon, Madison, Marion, Mason, McDonough, Monroe, Morgan, Ogle, Perry, Pike, Randolph, Richland, Rock Island, Saint Clair, Saline, Shelby, Stark, Suburban Cook, Tazewell, Union, Warren, Wayne, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago.

The state may allow workers in hospitals that care for residents of those 50 counties — such as St. John's and Memorial Medical Center in Springfield and OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria — to receive some of the first doses even though the counties where those hospitals are located aren't among the 50 with the highest death rates.

Front-line health care workers and nursing home residents are scheduled to be offered the vaccine first, followed by others at higher risk of COVID-19-related medical complications. For now, it's likely that only people 18 and older will be offered vaccine because the vaccine hasn't been tested on children yet.

The Illinois Department of Employment Security reported 107,616 new unemployment claims were filed across the state last week, the week of Nov. 29, the most jobless claims the state has had in nearly eight months. Illinois' estimated claims last week were among 853,000 total filed across the country (seasonally adjusted). Illinois numbers have not been this high since mid-April, when there were over 141,000 claims filed the week of April 6. Illinois makes up 3.9% of the US population and 11.3% of the benefit applications. The Governor has claimed in the past that these numbers are inflated due to fraud.

### **LaSalle Veterans' Home Shakeup**

On Monday, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Director Linda Chapa LaVia fired the Administrator of the LaSalle Veterans' Home, Angela Mehlbrech, and placed the Director of Nursing on administrative leave pending the ongoing investigation into the COVID-19 outbreak. Acting Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn will serve as interim Administrator pending the search for a permanent replacement. The announcement came after Mehlbrech announced Saturday the 32<sup>nd</sup> resident of the facility had died. Sadly, another resident died this week, bringing the total to 33 deaths since the outbreak began on November 1.

The Illinois Senate Veterans Affairs Committee recently convened a hearing of the committee to learn more about the outbreak. Left with more questions than answers, on December 8 the committee officially requested official documentation of IDVA Director Chapa LaVia.

Members of the Illinois National Guard staff were sent to the LaSalle, Quincy, and Manteno Veterans' homes on Thursday to assist with COVID-19 testing and screening. It's not a deployment and those going into the facilities are National Guard staff members and not reserve members. The deadly outbreak has taken the lives of more than a quarter of the residents at LaSalle and two residents at Quincy.

### **Public University Enrollment Holding Steady Despite National Decline**

According to [public university enrollment data](#), overall enrollment in the state was up by 0.2 percent or 417 students compared to fall of 2019 with 182,586 students currently enrolled in public universities. A nationwide snapshot of fall enrollment shows higher education down by 1.8 percent compared to 2019, per the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. For more information, including disaggregated data by race/ethnicity and gender, review the "[IBHE First Look Fall Enrollment](#)" report.

### **New Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security**

The Illinois Department of Human Services and Governor Pritzker recently announced the Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security, created by Public Act 101-636. The Commission is tasked with developing and adopting a strategic plan that will develop anti-poverty programs that ensure long-term, multigenerational economic mobility regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or identity, ability, or geographic location. The plan will be available in spring 2021. Members include Senator Kim Lightford (D), Senator Dale Fowler (R), Representative Lamont Robinson (D), and Representative Jeff Keicher (R), along with several representatives of community organizations, local governments, higher education, and other institutions.

### **Marijuana Revenue Reaches New High**

The Illinois Department of Revenue posted a record \$22.9 million in taxes from recreational marijuana in November, following in the footsteps of the record \$75.3 million in sales from October, as collections

typically lag a month behind sales. With the increase from the previous month's record of \$21 million, the state approached \$150 million in tax revenue generated from \$582 million in sales in the first 11 months of legalization. Legal weed came within \$3 million of the revenue generated from liquor taxes, as the state collected \$25.7 million from booze sales in November.

### **State Budget**

The Department of Revenue reported that gas taxes reached a pandemic high of \$213 million in November, and hotel taxes cracked \$10 million for the first time since COVID-19 hit in March. Gaming taxes, however, barely exceeded \$100,000. Last November, the state recorded \$227 million in motor-fuel taxes, \$46 million in hotel taxes, and \$161,000 in gaming revenue.

The Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability released its Special Pension Briefing, showing that the total unfunded liabilities of the state's pension systems for state employees, teachers and university employees, legislators, and judges are \$141 billion. The Teachers' Retirement Systems leads the unfunded deficit with \$80.7 billion. TRS accounts for 58 percent of the total assets and liabilities of the five state pension systems. Actuarially insufficient state funding for pensions contributed the most to the increase in unfunded liability, growing from \$122 billion in FY1996 to \$141 billion in FY2020.

### **Renewable Energy Legislation Remains Top Priority in 2021**

Legislative leaders Tuesday urged the General Assembly to take up "Path to 100" legislation, explaining that the state needs to renew financial incentives for renewable energy investment and support the creation of temporary and permanent jobs in the renewable energy industry. Sen. Bill Cunningham (D-Chicago) was joined on a press call by Rep. Will Davis (D-Hazel Crest) and representatives from the Solar Energy Industries Association, Rethink Electric, the American Wind Energy Association, and EDP Renewables. ([HB 2966/SB 1781](#))

### **2021 State Fair**

The Illinois State Fair announced seven confirmed [Illinois Lottery Grandstand acts for 2021](#). This is the first time the Illinois State Fair has announced and gone on-sale with grandstand acts prior to the new year. Fairgoers who purchase grandstand tickets will receive a full refund if COVID-19 prevents the Illinois State Fair from being held. Illinois State Fair officials also announced the start of the holiday promotional campaign starring the Mega Pass and a new [Jumbo Pass](#), which will give fairgoer access to everything the Mega Pass offers but with unlimited rides on the Giant Slide. Access these deals and additional fair info at [www.illinoisstatefair.info](http://www.illinoisstatefair.info).