

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

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The Illinois Senate released its 2021 Legislative Calendar (attached to this email). Dates are subject to change, and we continue to wait for a calendar from the Illinois House of Representatives. The Senate also altered its **committee structure for appropriations**. Instead of two committees, the Senate will have just one appropriations committee, chaired by **Sen. Elgie Sims** (D-Chicago), which will have 14 subcommittees. Each subcommittee will have jurisdiction over individual agencies. For the full list of subcommittees and assigned chairpersons and agencies, please scroll to the end of this update.

Late Friday last week, **the 19 Representatives** publicly in opposition to reelecting House Speaker Michael Madigan released a letter stating they are “unified in our belief that our caucus needs new leadership.” The statement followed a letter the 19 received from six of their Democrat colleagues who asked them “to come together as a family” and talk about a “path forward for us all.” The 19 have made it clear they are not going back on their pledge not to vote for Madigan. The Speaker remains six votes shy of the 60 he needs.

On Monday, December 14, the **House Special Investigative Committee** reconvened to continue its charter to determine whether the Speaker acted in “conduct unbecoming of a legislator” due to bribery allegations against Madigan stemming from the federal ComEd investigation. The lengthy hearing didn’t reveal new information but was certainly explosive. Ultimately, a vote to issue subpoenas failed, partisan tempers flared, the motion to charge Madigan with wrongdoing failed, and the committee adjourned. Gov. JB Pritzker said he was “really disappointed” Speaker Madigan did not take advantage of the “forum” presented by the special House committee investigating him.

Rep. Emanuel “Chris” Welch, chair of the House Special Investigative Committee, was the lead vote-getter amongst members of the **House Black Caucus** for the four coveted leadership spots reserved for members of the Black Caucus. Welch received 17 votes of the 21 voting members (one member didn’t vote), **Reps. Mary Flowers and Marcus Evans** were elected with 14 votes each, and **Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth** received 13 votes. The remaining candidates – Rep. Will Davis, Rep. Lamont Robinson, and Rep. Nick Smith – fell short of the cutoff. In Speaker Madigan’s effort to receive the endorsement of the Black Caucus, Madigan committed an additional seat on his leadership team, increasing Black Caucus seats from 3 to 4 members for the 102nd General Assembly. Black Caucus members of the leadership team for the 101st GA include Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth, former Rep. Art Turner, and Rep. Will Davis.

The House Black Caucus voted unanimously to elect Rep. **Kambium “Kam” Buckner** as chair, replacing **Rep. Camille Lilly**, whose term has ended. **Rep. Maurice West** was elected secretary of the Black Caucus, also unanimously.

Pritzker Proposes \$700 Million in Cuts

Governor Pritzker has proposed over [\\$700 million](#) in cuts to executive branch agencies for the current fiscal year. The proposed cuts are within the purview of the Governor to manage without help from the General Assembly. The Governor acknowledged these cuts aren't a full solution to the budget deficit and committed to working with the legislature for "additional and more permanent" budget solutions.

Implementation of some of the saving measures has already begun. The plan includes **hiring freezes, grant reductions, and operational savings**. Governor Pritzker announced ongoing negotiations with AFSCME and other employee unions to identify \$75 million in personnel costs adjustments, which could include **furlough days**, as part of the total cuts; and the creation of a Department of Corrections "**facilities closure work group**" to identify savings due to the lower offender population. Additionally, the state will delay by three months a promised rate hike for community care workers that was scheduled to take effect January 1 and will temporarily halt all vehicle purchases. Most grants will be frozen, but some grants issued by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity will be cut 5 percent.

The current FY21 budget depends on a \$5 billion federal bailout to be balanced – which has yet to materialize. Because the state income tax filing was moved to July, which is the current fiscal year, those unanticipated revenues brings the projected deficit for the current fiscal year to \$3.9 billion, which has been lowered by \$2 billion because the state is borrowing that money from the Federal Reserve. That leaves the state with a \$1.9 billion hole to fill by June 30. The Governor's proposed cuts closes the hole a bit more to \$1.2 billion. Federal aid would help close the gap, but current bipartisan negotiations on a federal stimulus package do not currently include new aid for states.

During one of Pritzker's daily briefings, he was asked if he would consider **raising the state's 4.95%** flat income tax rate. Pritzker said he is focused on the cuts — for now.

COVID-19 Update & VACCINES

Last Friday the Illinois Department of Public Health reported 7,377 new confirmed and probable cases of coronavirus disease in Illinois, including 181 additional deaths. Currently, IDPH is reporting a total of 886,805 cases, including 15,015 deaths. Laboratories have also reported a total of 12,259,595 test specimens. As of Friday night, 4,690 in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 1,023 patients were in the ICU, and 589 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators. The preliminary seven-day statewide positivity for cases as a percent of total test from 12/11 – 12/17 is 8.0%. The preliminary seven-day statewide test positivity from 12/11 – 12/17 is 9.7%.

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 \(available via this link\)](#).

Governor Pritzker clarified last week he **will not reduce mitigations on regions until after the holidays**, even if those regions have already qualified for reduced mitigations, as have Region 1 (Northwest IL: Rockford, DeKalb, Galena), Region 6 (East-Central IL: Champaign, Charleston, Effingham), and Region 9 (McHenry and Lake counties).

On Monday, December 14, Illinois received the first shipment of the **Pfizer coronavirus vaccine**. The state received approximately 43,000 doses in the first shipment and expects additional shipments in the coming weeks. Most doses in this shipment were delivered from the Illinois Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to Regional Hospital Coordination Centers around the state that serve as pick up locations for local health departments to begin distribution to healthcare workers in their jurisdictions, with the remaining portion going directly to predetermined local health departments. Chicago, Cook County, Lake County, Madison County, and St. Clair County received direct shipments from the federal government. These direct shipments account for the state's initial expected allocation of 109,000 doses. This week, vaccines are being administered in 96 hospitals associated with the 50 counties that have highest COVID-19 death rates per capita. Every hospital will be providing vaccinations to health care workers next week. The state expects to get vaccine doses from Moderna in roughly two weeks, which will help bolster vaccination rates in the coming weeks.

Governor Pritzker began his daily COVID-19 briefing last Wednesday by saying anticipated shipments of the vaccine nationwide in the next two weeks have been cut in half, "which will likely cut our state's projected Pfizer shipments this month in half." Officials in multiple states received the same alert. A spokesperson from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services disagreed, arguing the distribution plan remains on track. On Thursday, Pfizer released a statement saying the company faced no production issues and had more doses available than were being distributed. "We have millions more doses sitting in our warehouse but, as of now, we have not received any shipment instructions for additional doses," the statement read.

With more than **655,000 health care workers across the state**, the vaccination of front-line workers is expected to take months – followed by nursing home residents and staff. But the question is then who is next in line? Teachers, firefighters, and camp counselors, among others, all say they should be next – **who is most "essential?"** The CDC began to settle that yesterday (Sunday, December 20), when an advisory panel recommended who should follow medical workers and nursing home residents.

Here are the distribution plans for the [state](#), [Cook County](#), and [Chicago](#). Eventually, the general public will be able to access the vaccine from your local primary care physician, health clinic, and some pharmacies like Walgreens and CVS.

Governor Pritzker joined a bipartisan group of midwestern governors to urge citizens to remain safe heading into the holiday season. Other participating governors are from Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Governor Re-Issues Disaster Proclamation and Executive Orders Related to COVID-19

Late Friday, December 11, Governor Pritzker reissued the [Disaster Proclamation](#) for an additional 30 days and filed [Executive Order 2020-74](#) which reissued most executive orders, extending a majority of the provisions through January 9, 2021.

New Minimum Rate Rates to Take Effect on 1/1/2021

On January 1, 2021, the minimum wage will increase to \$11 per hour as part of the schedule of increases signed into law in 2019 providing a path to \$15 minimum wage by 2025. Minimum wage earners received two increases in 2020 to \$9.25 an hour on January 1, followed by an increase to \$10 an hour on July 1. The minimum wage will continue to increase an additional \$1 an hour each January 1 until it reaches \$15 an hour in 2025. Workers who are under 18 years old and work fewer than 650 hours in a year will earn a minimum wage of \$8.50 per hour beginning January 1. The youth minimum wage rate will gradually rise to \$13 an hour by 2025.

Cook County has a higher minimum wage than the state, currently \$13 an hour. The current city of Chicago minimum wage is \$13.50 an hour for small employers (4 to 20 employees) and \$14 an hour for large employers (21 or more employees).

Unemployment Update

The Illinois Department of Employment Security announced 138,359 new unemployment claims were filed during the week of December 6 in Illinois (the state unemployment rate is approximately 7%). For comparison, during the same timeframe last year, 15,076 people filed claims in Illinois. Since March, there have been more than 2.4 million total claims in Illinois. Illinois numbers have not been this high since April 6, when there were over 201,000 new claims filed the week of March 30. There were 107,616 new unemployment claims filed the week of November 29.

Unfunded Pension Liability -- \$144 Billion

A [Special Pension Briefing](#) released by the bipartisan and bicameral Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability revealed the unfunded liabilities across the state's public employee pension systems totaled \$144.4 billion on June 30. The Teachers Retirement System, whose unfunded liabilities amounted to \$83.3 billion, represents 57.7% of the combined total. On average, the funded ratio is nearly 40%. One of the main drivers of the underfunding continues to be the actuarially insufficient state contributions determined by the current pension funding policy under P.A. 88-593 – meaning that if all actuarial assumptions are met, unfunded liabilities will continue to increase because the state isn't contributing enough to stop the growth of the unfunded liability.

The state legislature budgeted about \$9.8 billion for pension payments in the current fiscal year. COGFA estimates that will need to go up another \$800 million dollars next year just to fully fund pensions.

Veteran's Affairs Committee Hearing on LaSalle Home COVID-19 Outbreak

A House committee heard testimony last Wednesday from Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs officials, including Director Linda Chapa LaVia, to get at the root cause of the COVID-19 outbreak at the LaSalle Veterans' Home that sickened more than 200 workers and residents and killed 33 residents. Officials testified control efforts have curbed the spread of the outbreak since the deadly outbreak began last month. Despite that progress, lawmakers on the committee raised concerns about the state's response – in particular, the nearly two-week delay from when the initial outbreak was reported to the first on-site visit by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. There are currently 16 residents still positive for the virus out of the 93 total residents remaining at LaSalle, and one positive employee, according to an IDVA spokesperson. Lawyers representing families of some of the deceased veterans have launched investigations that could lead to lawsuits filed on their behalf.

2020 Census Results

Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Human Services today announced the results of the 2020 Census in Illinois. Illinois surpassed the 2010 self-response rate of 70.5 percent, finishing at **71.4 percent**. For more information about the 2020 Census and the final numbers, visit the [Illinois Census 2020 Homepage](#).

Sports Betting Announced Record Handle in October

With all five of its mobile sports betting operators available online for the entire month for the first time since operators went live in March, the Illinois Gaming Board announced a record handle of **\$434.6 million** in October. The figure was 42.4 percent higher than the \$305.2 million reported in September, when both PointsBet and William Hill launched operations mid-month.

Illinois Partners with ALDI to Provide Online Grocery Access for SNAP Recipients

Illinois residents have a new retail option for using Electronic Benefit Transfer and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (EBT SNAP) online through Instacart. In a new partnership with ALDI, participants will be able to access fresh food and pantry staples from ALDI via Instacart's same-day delivery and pick-up services. Illinois' initial Online SNAP EBT option launched in June 2020, including Amazon and Walmart.

Mercy Hospital to Remain Open for Now

Illinois regulators unanimously rejected historic Mercy Hospital's request to close. Regulators feared patients would have less access to medical care, especially in a pandemic, and noted Mercy's emergency department in particular is critical to the surrounding communities, treating nearly 60,000 patients. It's one of the busiest emergency departments in Chicago. The vote was unusual. The board rarely rejects hospital closures. The vote came after months of protests from physicians, health care advocates and community organizers against the closure. Located in the Bronzeville neighborhood, most of Mercy's patients are Black. Doctors also treat many Cantonese-speaking patients from nearby neighborhoods, including Chinatown. During the board meeting, a representative for Gov. Pritzker spoke on his behalf, saying the governor opposes Mercy's closure.

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEES

Subcommittee on Education- SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR MANAR, VC BELT

Illinois Board of Education
Illinois Math & Science Academy
IL Ed Labor Relations Board

Subcommittee on Higher Education- SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR BENNETT

Board of Higher Education
Student Assistance Commission
Chicago State University
Community College Board
Eastern Illinois University
Governor's State University
Illinois State University
Northeastern Illinois University
Northern Illinois University
Southern Illinois University
University of Illinois
Western Illinois University

Subcommittee on Human Services- SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR FEIGENHOLTZ

Department of Human Services
Department of Children and Family Services
Council on Developmental Disabilities
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Commission
Guardianship & Advocacy Commission

Subcommittee on Health- SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR MORRISON

Department of Healthcare & Family Services
Department of Public Health
Department on Aging
Department of Veterans Affairs
Illinois Coroner Training Board

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice- SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR HUNTER

Department of Corrections
Department of Juvenile Justice
Criminal Justice Information Authority
Prisoner Review Board

Subcommittee on State Law Enforcement-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR MUNOZ, VC JOHNSON
Department of State Police
Law Enforcement Training Standards Board
State Police Merit Board

Subcommittee on Emergency Management-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR ELLMAN
Office of the State Fire Marshall
Illinois Emergency Management Agency
Department of Military Affairs

Subcommittee on General Services-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR AQUINO
Central Management Services
Department of Innovation & Technology
Department of Human Rights
Board of Elections
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum
Arts Council
Court of Claims
University Civil Service Commission
Human Rights Commission
Legislative Commissions (COGFA/JCAR/LEC/LIG/LIS/LRU/LRB/Architect of Capitol)
Procurement Policy Board
Civil Service Committee
EEC/EIG
SERS (ops only)

Subcommittee on Revenue and Finance-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR STEANS
Department of Revenue
Department of the Lottery
Office of Management & Budget
Property Tax Appeals Board
Racing Board
Gaming Board
Independent Tax Tribunal
Metropolitan Pier & Expo Authority
Sports Facility Authority
Illinois Finance Authority

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Environment & Energy-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR KOEHLER, VC HASTINGS
Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Agriculture
Department of Natural Resources
Illinois Commerce Commission

Illinois Power Agency
Drycleaner Environmental Response Trust Fund Council

Subcommittee on Business Regulation & Labor-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR HOLMES, VC JONES

Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
Department of Employment Security
Department of Financial & Professional Regulation
Department of Insurance
Department of Labor
Worker's Compensation Commission
Liquor Control Commission
Labor Relations Board

Subcommittee on Judiciary-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR CROWE

Supreme Court
Appellate Defender
Appellate Prosecutor
Judicial Inquiry Board
Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission

Subcommittee on Constitutional Offices-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR MURPHY, VC HARRIS

Office of the Governor
Office of the Lt. Governor
Office of the Attorney General
Office of the Secretary of State
Office of the Comptroller
Office of the Treasurer
Office of the Auditor General

Subcommittee on Government Infrastructure-SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR VILLIVALAM, VC HUNTER

Department of Transportation
Toll Highway Authority
Capitol Development Board