

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

March 1, 2021

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

The Illinois General Assembly did not convene last week, but much more legislation was filed. Virtual committee hearings have been posted for both chambers, beginning Monday, March 1. Neither chamber is scheduled to convene this week, but there is talk of legislators returning to Springfield on Tuesday, March 9. Lobbyists and the general public would not be allowed in the State Capitol.

The House deadline for filing substantive legislation was Friday, February 19. A total of 4,002 House bills have been filed. In the Senate, a total of 2,780 bills were filed before the Friday, February 26 deadline.

As Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch indicated in his first speech, House Rules require all House bills to be assigned to committee; the chairs will then have the authority to decide whether bills will be called for a vote in the committee. That said, House committees will be very full this week with assigned bills and committee hearings. [House](#) and [Senate](#) Committee hearing dates can be found [here](#).

*****Please review [ICCTA's BILL LIST](#).**

Due to the new virtual committee process, it is vital that we know your positions so that legislation does not slip through unopposed.***

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM SIGNED INTO LAW

On Monday, Gov. JB Pritzker signed [House Bill 3653](#), the criminal justice reform package. Backed by the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, this newly enacted law will end the use of cash bail for non-violent offenses in the state by 2023, create a statewide certification system for law enforcement officers, require all law enforcement officers to wear body cameras by 2025, and expand use-of-force guidelines and training for law enforcement. Other provisions aim to provide more transparency and accountability in policing, including enhancing protections for whistleblowers and banning the use of chokeholds by law enforcement. Illinois becomes the first state to eliminate cash bail. Opponents of HB 3653 included multiple states’ attorneys and law enforcement organizations, who said that the reform package makes communities less safe and places unfunded mandates on local law enforcement agencies and courts. Police leaders have also said the new law may create challenges in officer recruitment and retention.

COVID-19 WORKERS COMP EXTENSION SIGNED INTO LAW

On Friday, Gov. Pritzker signed [HB 4276](#) into law, effective immediately. The legislation extends worker compensation benefits until June 30, 2021, for first responders and frontline essential workers who were exposed to and contracted COVID-19 through their job.

MADIGAN SUCCESSOR APPOINTED – THEN RESIGNED – THEN GUERRERO-CUELLAR APPOINTED

The 22nd House District seat held by Michael Madigan for 50 years was occupied by Edward Guerra Kodatt, a 26-year-old aide within Madigan’s 13th ward – for three days. Initially, 11 applicants applied to replace the longtime House Speaker. As precinct committeeperson, Madigan held 56 percent of the weighted vote for the appointment and was able to select his replacement. Kodatt then resigned at Madigan’s urging, after Madigan learned of “alleged questionable conduct by Mr. Kodatt.” The House clerk received Kodatt’s resignation Wednesday morning, February 24. On Thursday, Madigan selected community activist Angelica Guerrero-Cuellar, the candidate who received the second most votes in the original vote and the choice of Ald. Silvana Tabares.

MADIGAN RESIGNS AS CHAIR OF DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF ILLINOIS

After appointing the successor to his House seat, Madigan announced he is stepping down as chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois – a move he said he was not ready to make just last week. U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Matteson) and Chicago Ald. Michelle Harris are vying for the role. In an interview, Madigan said he will remain active in Democratic politics — though he will not be involved in the redistricting process. And asked whether he stayed in office too long, the former House speaker said, “I don’t think so. Others may disagree.”

BRING BACK THE GRADUATED INCOME TAX PLAN?

Speaker Welch suggested Wednesday that he still supports changing the state income tax structure from a flat-tax rate to a graduated structure. He explained that he would like to see it go before voters again -- but with pension obligations attached to it. “Tell the voters exactly how you’re going to spend this new money, and they may trust us more,” Welch said, adding that it is a tactic that has worked in other states.

BAILEY ANNOUNCED CAMPAIGN FOR GOVERNOR

State Sen. Darren Bailey (R-Xenia) kicked off his long-anticipated campaign for Governor last Monday. Bailey has been a loud critic of Gov. Pritzker and has led the conservative movement against the Governor’s executive orders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MCCANN PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Former state senator and gubernatorial candidate Sam McCann has pled not guilty in his campaign-fund fraud case. McCann was indicted by a federal grand jury on February 3. He is accused of engaging in an elaborate scheme to illegally use campaign funds for expenses that include automobile and mortgage payments.

2021 KEY SESSION DATES:

- March 26 Deadline for substantive bills out of committee
- March 29 - April 9 Spring break
- April 6 Consolidated election (including community college trustee seats)
- April 23 Deadline for 3rd reading of substantive bills
- May 14 Deadline for substantive bills to pass out of committee in the opposite chamber
- May 28 Deadline for 3rd reading of substantive bills
- May 31 Adjournment

COVID-19 & VACCINE UPDATE

COVID cases and deaths continue to drop, as the statewide seven-day positivity rate decreases to 2.7 percent. The Illinois Department of Public Health is reporting a total of 1,183,667 cases, including 20,460 deaths as of Friday. All information pertaining to the state of Illinois’ Coronavirus Response can be found [here](#). COVID-19 vaccination data can be found [here](#).

As of Thursday, Illinois expanded Phase 1B eligibility to include individuals with underlying conditions, including those 16 and older. Residents will not be required to provide proof of an underlying condition.

Additional state-supported mass vaccination sites in Rockford and Collinsville launched last week, and a site at the United Center arena will be available on March 10. Downstate sites will ramp up to provide up to 1,350 doses per day at full capacity, and the United Center could provide as many as 6,000 vaccine doses per day. These sites build upon the mass vaccination infrastructure across the state, with 14 state-supported sites now operating in Illinois. There are now more than 850 vaccination locations in Illinois open to the public. While the state is working to increase the number of vaccines administered daily, it is limited by the amount of vaccine available and allocated by the federal government. Location information is listed on the coronavirus.illinois.gov website.

As of Monday, Illinois ranked 22nd among the 50 U.S. states for per capita vaccine distribution, with 16.1 percent of the state's population having received at least one dose (according to [data from The New York Times](#)). The state had previously ranked as low as 47th nationally in late January, according to that database. Roughly 6.7 percent of the population has received two doses.

Additionally, a newly approved single-dose vaccine from Johnson & Johnson will make millions more doses available to states in the coming weeks – possibly even a 20 percent increase in Illinois' supply. Illinois expects to begin administering an average of **100,000 doses per day by mid-March**, Gov. Pritzker said after touring a vaccination site in West Peoria on Wednesday.

Chicago has eased travel limits as the statewide infections and hospitalizations fall to July-level numbers. The city will no longer apply travel restrictions to individuals who have been fully vaccinated against the virus.

LEGISLATIVE PANEL FOCUSES ON HEALTHCARE ISSUES

Key lawmakers participated in a panel led by Healthnews Illinois this week. House Majority Leader Greg Harris (D) shared that he wants the General Assembly's Medicaid Working Group to focus on behavioral health access and prior authorization to ensure insurance companies are "not abusing" the practice. He also mentioned his PBM reform bill ([House Bill 3630](#)) and said that he wants to address the needs of patients with post-acute COVID-19 syndrome. Deputy Republican Leader Tom Demmer (R) warned that carving services from the state's managed care program for Medicaid could cause insurance plans to leave the program. Rep. Demmer is focusing on telehealth, allowing it to be a permanent part of healthcare delivery. Senate Majority Caucus Chair Mattie Hunter (D) continues to work on the Black Caucus' healthcare bill, which did not pass the General Assembly in January due to timing.

REIMBURSEMENT FOR TELEHEALTH SERVICES

Several bills introduced this year would require insurance plans to cover telehealth services while reimbursing providers at the same rates as in-person visits. [House Bill 3498](#) is backed by the Coalition to Protect Telehealth, largely supported by the Illinois Hospitals and Healthcare Association. The current executive order, in place due to COVID-19, directs all commercial health insurers to cover telehealth services and reimburse providers at in-person visit rates, also prohibiting any cost-sharing for in-network providers unless a deductible has not been met for high-deductible plans. Gov. Pritzker continues to extend the executive order in place since last March.

ISBE SEEKS WAIVER FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS

For the second year in a row, the Illinois State Board of Education is seeking a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for standardized tests normally given during schools' spring semester. State Superintendent Carmen Ayala has noted that more than a million Illinois students are still receiving their education completely through remote learning. If the Education Department agrees, tests like the SAT and certain graduation requirements — like high school civics — would be waived for the Class of 2021. More than 600 district superintendents across the state also signed onto the waiver application.

PRITZKER CALLS ON LOW-INTEREST LOAN PROGRAM FOR SMALL MUNICIPALITIES HIT WITH HIGH GAS PRICES

In response to recent extreme weather conditions, Gov. Pritzker has asked the Illinois Finance Authority to develop a \$15 million low-interest loan program to help small municipalities that have been financially impacted by record high natural gas prices. On average, natural gas in the winter costs the impacted municipal utilities around \$2-\$3 per dekatherm. Municipal utilities drawing from the Panhandle Pipeline paid \$225 per dekatherm from February 13 through February 16. These bills are required to be paid within the next few weeks, and small municipalities could be financially crippled without any assistance.

EXPANDED CAREER TRAINING FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Gov. Pritzker has announced new investments to the Youth Career Pathways program that will expand training for Illinois youth who face barriers to education, training, and employment. Through a Notice of Funding Opportunity released by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois will expand access to training and support services for youth ages 16-24 and who are most at-risk for falling behind on career preparation. The NOFO is seeking proposals from school districts, community colleges, community-based organizations and other partners equipped to provide workforce development training that will help vulnerable youth gain access to skills training and work-based learning that will prepare them for job entry. Applications for the NOFO are due on April 1. To apply for the NOFO, please visit [DCEO's website](#).

2020 HEMP HARVEST NUMBERS DROP

The Illinois Department of Agriculture has released final harvest numbers from the 2020 hemp growing season. IDOA issued 802 Hemp Growers licenses for the 2020 season. Hemp farmers reported 2,734 acres planted, resulting in 2,392 acres harvested. The 2020 numbers are down from 2019 -- just over 2,800 acres for total harvested crop. "The hemp industry, just like many others was hit by the pandemic," said IDOA Division of Cannabis Manager David Lakeman.

ILLINOIS BEP PROGRAM ANNOUNCES DISPARITY STUDY

The Illinois Department of Central Management Services' Business Enterprise Program has announced a new disparity study that will examine the availability and utilization of businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and people living with disabilities on state contracts. This study is one of the latest efforts by the state to promote the economic inclusion of historically disadvantaged businesses in accordance with state law ([30 ILCS 575/4\(d\)](#)).

State and local governments must provide a factual basis that a disparity exists in accessing contracting opportunities as a precondition to establishing affirmative action programs. The study will provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to determine the availability of ready, willing, able and qualified firms for participation in state contracts; determine if a disparity exists; and if so, determine why the disparity exists and what solutions or remedies could be implemented.

EXELON TO BREAK UP

Energy provider Exelon announced it will split into two publicly traded companies, separating its regulated utilities business (including ComEd) from its power generation unit (including the nation's largest fleet of carbon-free nuclear power plants) in the biggest breakup of a local company in nearly a decade. According to Exelon, the separation gives each company the financial and strategic independence to focus on specific customer needs while executing core business strategies. The company added that it will "retire" uneconomic assets that negatively affect its ability to provide a reliable source of clean power, meaning that Illinois nuclear power plants could still be closed as planned. The split must be approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and New York's utility regulators.

For more information on state legislative and public policy issues, please contact:

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