

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

March 14, 2022

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

The Illinois General Assembly convened last week, focusing on appropriations hearings and committee hearings for bills in the second chamber. The Senate will work in district this week with virtual hearings, while the House will meet in person at the State Capitol. The deadline for passing bills from the second chamber committees is Friday, March 25.

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

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

CHANGES TO COVID-19 PROTOCOLS IN THE CAPITOL

Both the House and Senate have changed their rules to allow masks to be optional. The Senate will still require testing for access to the chamber, including the galleries (which will be open at 50% capacity). Senate elevators will remain locked for all but staff and members, and the area outside the chambers where lobbyists congregate will also remain closed. Appointments to meet with members are no longer required but “strongly encouraged.”

The House plans to hold some in-person committee hearings this week in Room 114, which is equipped for remote participation. Both chambers will continue the practice of remote hearings.

2022 KEY SESSION DATES

- March 25: House & Senate Committee Deadline
- April 1: House & Senate 3rd Reading Deadline
- April 8: Adjournment

2022 CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The 2022 election season is officially underway for Illinois congressional, legislative, state, and county offices. Candidates have until 5 PM today (March 14) to formally file their petitions to get their names on the June 28 primary ballot.

- Former Democratic state Rep. **Diane Pappas** was appointed to replace former Sen. **Tom Cullerton**, who resigned last week ahead of his guilty plea to federal embezzlement charges. The one-term legislator lost in 2020 to Rep. **Seth Lewis**, who is now running for Senate in a different district. Sen. **Suzy Glowiak Hilton** was mapped into the 23rd District with Sen. Cullerton, so Pappas will not likely run there. She could, however, challenge Lewis for Senate.
- Chicago police detective **Erin Jones** announced that she is seeking to challenge state Sen. **Robert Martwick** in the 10th Senate District’s Democratic primary.
- A total of 16 Democrats have filed so far to replace U.S. Rep. **Bobby Rush** in the Chicago-area 1st Congressional District. Most notable are state Sen. **Jacqueline Collins** (D-Chicago), Chicago Ald. **Pat Dowell**, and **Jonathan Jackson**, son of Rev. **Jesse Jackson**.

- **Willie Preston** has filed to run for the 16th Senate District seat vacated by Sen. Collins. Preston is a former community activist who runs two small businesses (construction and landscaping) and is backed by Chicago Ald. **Howard Brookins**.

ILLINOIS GAS TAX PROPOSALS

In 2019, the state gas taxes totaled 31 cents per gallon. They are now 63 cents, in addition to the 19-cent federal gas tax. Gov. **JB Pritzker** has suggested freezing the annual gas tax increase for one year. However, gas tax revenues are used to fund infrastructure projects. Chicago Mayor **Lori Lightfoot** has also stated that she is considering reducing or eliminating the city's 8-cent gas tax.

BILL PROPOSES \$2 BILLION IN ARPA DOLLARS FOR UNEMPLOYMENT FUND

The Senate voted 33 to 15 on March 10 to allocate \$2 billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to shore up at least part of the \$4.5 billion deficit in Illinois' Unemployment Trust Fund. Sen. **Linda Holmes** (D-Aurora) said that [Senate Bill 2803](#) was passed in order to meet bill deadlines, while an agreed bill negotiating process continues with labor union and business stakeholders. Holmes also said that \$2 billion will not be the final number. Republicans criticized the move, arguing that Illinois should use more of its ARPA funds to completely wipe out the deficit.

DRIVER'S LICENSE AND ID CARD EXPIRATION DATES EXTENDED UNTIL JULY 31

Illinois Secretary of State **Jesse White** announced that expiration dates for driver's licenses, ID cards, and learner's permits are being extended until July 31, 2022. This extension does not apply to commercial driver's licenses and CDL learner's permits. The previous extension was set to end on March 31.

IN-PERSON REGISTRATION RULE FOR SPORTS BETTING ENDS

Illinois has permanently eliminated the in-person registration requirement for sports betting, which had been waived for 10 months during the COVID pandemic. This opens up the floodgates for DraftKings, FanDuel, and other online sportsbooks to compete for Illinois customers.

MORE INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING RELEASED

The Illinois Department of Transportation has announced a fifth \$250 million installment for the Rebuild Illinois capital program for counties, municipalities, and townships to address local transportation needs. Rebuild Illinois is providing a total of \$1.5 billion spread out in six installments to advance local projects.

RISE GRANTS AVAILABLE

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity is investing \$3.5 million to accelerate local economic initiatives through the Research in Illinois to Spur Economic Development program. The state will offer competitive RISE grants to local governments and economic development organizations for new regional or local plans to promote economic recovery from the pandemic. The program is funded through ARPA money. The [application for grants](#) is now open through May 9.

HOUSE REPUBLICANS CALL FOR STATE DIVESTMENT FROM RUSSIA

Illinois House Republicans want to pass bills that would restrict the state's investment in Russian assets in retaliation for that country's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and the bombing of its cities:

- [House Bill 5702](#) and [HB5703](#) (Demmer) would allocate \$20 million from the General Revenue Fund to the Illinois Department of Human Services to assist with Ukrainian refugee resettlement.
- [HB5704](#) (Durkin) would prohibit investment of state public funds in any entity based in or tied to Russia.
- [HB5705](#) (Durkin) would require the Illinois Investment Policy Board to identify companies based in Russia and add them to the list of companies restricted from state pension fund investment.

HOTELS SEEK ARPA FUNDING TO ATTRACT, RETAIN STAFF

While COVID-19 cases and hospitalization remain low, the tourism industry has yet to fully recover. The hospitality sector is requesting support from the state to hire and retain employees to staff hotels once travelers come back. Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association president **Michael Jacobson** appeared alongside Sen. **Sara Feigenholtz** (D-Chicago) and Rep. **Kam Buckner** (D-Chicago) at a press conference to detail the proposed Hotel Jobs Recovery Act. The legislative package would distribute \$250 million of ARPA funds as one-time grants to every hotel in the state. Under the proposal, hotels would receive a grant equal to \$1,500 per room. The legislation, introduced as [HB5690](#) (Harris) and [SB4184](#) (Sims), stipulates that 80% of the funds be spent on payroll costs, including wages and benefits for employees.

ASSYRIAN CAUCUS AIMS TO ADVANCE INTERESTS OF UNDERSERVED DIASPORA

Legislators from the House and Senate announced the formation of a new caucus that hopes to advance issues facing an often misunderstood and overlooked group: Assyrian Americans. Assyrians are an ethnic group based in present day Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Their state existed first as a territory in the 21st century BC and eventually as an empire from the 14th century BC to the 7th century BC. During World War I, Christian Assyrians faced genocide committed by the Ottomans and other groups. This genocide took place alongside the Armenian genocide.

Sen. Ram **Villivalam** (D-Chicago), co-chair of the caucus, said that there are roughly 80,000 Assyrians living in Illinois, as well as 21 Assyrian civic organizations and 13 churches. Rep. **Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz** will serve as the other co-chair. The caucus hopes to pass [SJR 21](#) (Villivalam), which would make Illinois the fourth state to recognize the Assyrian genocide.

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

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