

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

March 22, 2021

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

SPRING SESSION UPDATE

It was a very busy five days in Springfield last week. The Senate convened in-person on Tuesday and Wednesday, and the House held a one-day marathon session on Thursday. The House passed bills to establish **permanent vote-by-mail expansions and curbside voting** statewide ([House Bill 1871](#)) and the Black Caucus' **healthcare reform bill** ([HB 158](#)).

HB 158 would implement several policy shifts aimed at addressing medical disparities. Cost estimates for the bill range from \$5 billion to \$12 billion to fully implement. The bill includes a moratorium on hospital closures until Dec. 31, 2023. Multiple Black legislators have recently advocated for measures that would prevent the closure of Mercy Hospital in Chicago, which has entered bankruptcy but serves many in poverty in the city's south side. A Medicaid Technical Assistance Center would work with community-based providers with addressing social determinants of health for behavioral health issues. The bill also creates an anti-racism commission that will create policy recommendations related to racial equity, requires implicit bias training for medical professionals, and allows Medicaid reimbursement for doulas working with pregnant and post-partum women. Republicans opposed the bill, raising questions over the costs of its provisions. It ultimately passed 72 to 41.

[Senate Bill 72](#) (Hoffman-D) also passed the House as an alternative to a lame-duck session bill that imposes a 9% **prejudgment interest** on injury awards beginning from notice of injury. SB 72 imposes prejudgment interest at a rate of 6% when the case is filed, with a maximum of five years, and the interest does not apply to punitive damages, sanctions, statutory attorney's fees or costs.

These measures now head to the Senate, where they are expected to pass. Not considered was a bill to "decouple" from federal tax law changes.

[House Bill 804](#) (the Clean Energy Jobs Act) passed from the House Energy & Environment Committee and is now on House Second Reading. The bill aims at committing Illinois to 100% renewable energy by 2050, focusing on carbon reduction and job creation. It ends "capacity payments" and automatic rate increases by requiring performance-based rate setting. The bill also removes Illinois from the multi-state capacity auction.

Both chambers continued holding **virtual committee hearings** last week and will do so again this week. All bills are due to be reported from a standing committee on March 26, but the Senate is extending the deadline to April 16. The House might do the same. The House is not expected to return to Springfield until after spring break in mid-April.

*****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.***

STATE BUDGET

Legislators are calling for their input to be considered when determining how the state will spend the \$7.5 billion in federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Gov. JB Pritzker has said the funds will be used to pay down debt incurred during the pandemic, including money borrowed from the federal government's municipal liquidity facility program. The state's unpaid bill backlog is still \$9.5 billion.

State Comptroller Susana Mendoza has warned that “this is not Christmas,” and that legislators should not make new plans on how to spend the federal money since it is “essentially spoken for” to put towards paying back borrowed funds. The State will not receive the \$7.5 billion at one time.

2021 KEY SESSION DATES

- March 26 Deadline for substantive bills out of committee (House)
- March 29 - April 9 Spring break
- April 6 Consolidated election (including community college trustee seats)
- April 16 Deadline for substantive bills out of committee (Senate)
- 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

THAPEDI RESIGNS

State Representative **Andre Thapedi** resigned from the 32nd House District. Democrat party leaders will appoint his replacement.

TAX FILING DEADLINES EXTENDED

The Internal Revenue Service and the state of Illinois are **delaying tax filings until May 17**. The newly announced Illinois filing extension, however, does not apply to estimated tax payments that are due on April 15.

REIMAGINE ILLINOIS

House Republicans announced their legislative priorities in their [Reimagine Illinois](#) platform, which outlines four “common sense” areas: ethics reform, fiscally responsible leadership, growing jobs, and ensuring public safety. Republicans are pushing for pension reform to address the state’s structural deficit.

COVID-19 & VACCINE UPDATE

COVID-19 numbers have remained relatively steady over the past week but have risen a little bit. **The 7-day statewide positivity rate is 2.5%**. All information pertaining to the Coronavirus Response from the Governor’s office and agencies can be found [here](#).

The state is averaging over **100,000 vaccines daily**. Gov. Pritzker is sending National Guard members to rural communities to deliver 1,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine daily. He also announced vaccine eligibility to all Illinois residents 16 and older will be available **beginning April 12**. Vaccine eligibility was expanded to several additional groups of essential workers (including **higher education staff**) ahead of the April 12 date:

- March 22, 2021 Higher education staff, government workers, and media
- March 29, 2021 Restaurant staff, construction trade workers, and religious leaders
- April 12, 2021 Any resident age 16 and up

Once 70% of the 65+ population has received a first vaccine dose (now at 58%), the state will move to a “**bridge phase**” for fully reopening. The state will resume normal business operations when at least 50% of all Illinoisans 16+ (now at 28%) have received at least one dose. Face coverings will be required until the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says they are not needed.

Chicago is moving to Phase 1C of its vaccination schedule by March 29, opening up eligibility to people with certain underlying health conditions and other essential workers.

Per the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Human Services, Illinois Medicaid fee-for-service participants and HealthChoice Illinois managed care plan participants will not be turned down for COVID-19 vaccination services. In addition, COVID-19 vaccination services will be provided at no cost to uninsured individuals, regardless of patient income, citizenship, or immigration status. Non-emergency transportation services are available for Medicaid fee-for-service and HealthChoice Illinois managed care plan participants to travel to and from a vaccine administration location to receive their COVID-19 vaccination.

ICC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NAMED

Michael Merchant has been named executive director for the Illinois Commerce Commission, following Christy George's resignation. Merchant is the first African-American to fill the role and has served as assistant director at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, leading the Business Enterprise Program.

ICC ENTERS CONSUMER PROTECTION AGREEMENT

The ICC has approved agreements to help electric, natural gas, water, and sewer residential customers hard hit by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate outstanding consumer debt and prevent disconnections before the voluntary winter moratorium on disconnections expires on March 31. Consumers struggling to pay their energy bill must call the utility to receive benefits and prevent disconnection. The stipulated agreements were negotiated and signed by ICC staff, the state's largest public utilities, and participating consumer advocate groups.

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

Illinois Community College Trustees Association

401 E. Capitol Avenue, Suite 200

Springfield, IL 62701

217-528-2858

www.communitycolleges.org

