

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

March 8, 2021

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

For the first time in Illinois General Assembly history, legislation passed out of committee hearings in a virtual setting last week. Approximately 40 committees were scheduled, but several were cancelled, and many merely conducted introductions and some housekeeping business. No gigantic issues have been considered yet. The House of Representatives will continue with virtual committees next week, but the Senate plans to convene in person at the State Capitol from Tuesday through Thursday. Lobbyists will not be allowed in the building to interact with legislators. All bills have now been filed – nearly 7,000 in all – but any bill can be amended with new language at any time.

*****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.***

CAMPAIGN UPDATES

U.S. Rep. **Robin Kelly** (D) replaces Michael Madigan as chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois.

State Sen. **Michael Hastings** (D) of Tinley Park has announced that he will run for Secretary of State in 2022. Hastings has served in the Senate for nine years. He faces a growing field of candidates: Chicago Ald. **Pat Dowell**, former state Treasurer (and Illinois Community College Board chair) **Alexi Giannoulis**, and Chicago City Clerk **Anna Valencia** are all trying to line up support for the contest.

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 UPDATE

COVID cases and deaths continue to drop, lowering the statewide seven-day positivity rate to **2.2 percent**. The Illinois Department of Public Health reports a total of 1,194,702 Illinois cases, including 20,700 deaths, as of Friday. All information pertaining to the state of Illinois' coronavirus response efforts can be found [here](#).

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued emergency use authorization to the University of Illinois System for covidSHIELD, its **saliva-based COVID-19 test**, which was used on U of I campuses for widespread testing with rapid results. The federal authorization will allow the program to easily expand testing for schools, businesses, and community partners. A total of \$20 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funding will provide a million tests across the state's 12 public universities and 48 community colleges, under an agreement between IDPH and the U of I system.

COVID VACCINE UPDATE

A total 3,780,305 doses of vaccine have been delivered to providers in Illinois, including Chicago. In addition, approximately 443,700 doses have been allocated to the federal government's Pharmacy Partnership Program for long-term care facilities. This brings the **total Illinois doses to 4,224,005**. A total of 3,125,425 vaccines have been administered in Illinois as of midnight Thursday, including 336,911 for long-term care facilities. The seven-day rolling average of vaccines administered daily is 83,115 doses. County COVID-19 vaccine administration data is available at <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccinedata?county=Illinois>.

Illinois expects to receive its **first shipment of Johnson & Johnson vaccines** totaling over 83,000 this week. Most of those doses will be distributed to mass vaccination sites throughout the state.

IDPH is encouraging vaccine recipients to utilize the [V-Safe after Vaccination Health Checker](#), which sends a text reminder for the second shot and allows patients to communicate with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about side-effects.

Gov. JB Pritzker has launched a **new public awareness campaign** directed to residents in the hardest-hit communities who are reluctant to receive the vaccine. The \$10 million campaign will reach Illinoisans statewide in both English and Spanish through a variety of media channels, including cable, broadcast and connected TV; streaming audio and radio; billboards and bus shelters; digital display and video; print and social media. Like other coronavirus-related expenses, costs are reimbursable by the federal government.

As of 3 p.m. Thursday, more than 27,800 seniors had signed up for vaccination appointments at the **United Center** in Chicago. Seniors continued to have "exclusive access" to the appointments through Sunday and doses will be administered at the site starting Tuesday.

The state of Illinois is partnering with **five local federally-qualified health centers** and **four safety-net hospitals** to administer COVID vaccines. Additional critical-access hospitals will be added in coming weeks. Two additional state-supported mass vaccination sites in **Des Plaines and Quincy** were launched last week. Information for locations is listed on the coronavirus.illinois.gov website.

ILLINOIS PENSION DEBT EXCEEDS \$300 BILLION

A new report by the credit rating agency Moody's says that Illinois will set a new record this year when it reports a total **net pension liability of more than \$300 billion** -- the highest of any state in the nation. As of June 30, the total unfunded liabilities of the state's five pension systems stood at \$317 billion, a 19 percent increase from the prior year. That was largely due to historically low interest rates, which have depressed pension fund earnings throughout the country. With the state's gross domestic product estimated to have fallen 2.5 percent in calendar year 2020, that pension liability amounts to roughly 37 percent of the state's total economic output, up from a range of 28-32 percent over the previous four years. When combined with other long-term liabilities (including retiree health care and bonded indebtedness), Moody's estimates that the state's total liability ratio will amount to **48 percent of GDP** for the fiscal year 2021 reporting cycle.

CANNABIS SALES HIT A NEW HIGH

In February, average daily sales of recreational marijuana hit a new high of roughly \$2.88 million, up from \$2.86 million a month earlier, according to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. All told, dispensaries sold more than \$80 million in recreational pot products last month. That marked a drop from the record \$88 million in sales recorded in January, when there were three more days of sales. In the first full year of legalization, **recreational pot sales reached nearly \$670 million**. Based on this year's first two months, total

sales in 2021 are on pace to eclipse **\$1 billion**. The sales figures are reported separately from medical marijuana tallies, which are reported later in the month.

STANDARDIZED TESTING OF STUDENTS

Illinois and other states across the country recently called on the federal government to waive requirements for federally mandated standardized testing this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But [in a letter](#) published late last month, the U.S. Department of Education wrote that schools must administer the exams, although they will not be held accountable for the results.

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