

ICCTA Government Relations and Public Policy Report

April 3, 2022

By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

The Illinois General Assembly convened in Springfield last week and was scheduled to remain in session for 12 consecutive days until adjournment. The House canceled its scheduled session for Saturday, April 2, however, and will reconvene on Sunday, April 3. The Senate went home for the weekend and will reconvene on Monday, April 4. Both chambers maintain that they will be done with their work by the scheduled adjournment date of Friday, April 8.

Significant issues to be addressed before the end of session include:

- Decreases in the state motor fuel tax or sales tax on gasoline
- Assessments for federal Medicaid funding for hospitals and nursing homes
- Crime reduction package
- Trailer bill to the 2021 energy reform bill
- Procurement reform
- Fiscal Year 2023 state budget

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

It is vital that we know your positions so that legislation does not slip through unopposed.***

APRIL IS ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE MONTH

Happy Illinois Community College Month! At ICCTA's request, Gov. JB Pritzker has issued a [proclamation declaring April 2022 as Illinois Community College Month](#) "in honor of the Illinois Community College System and the significant contribution these institutions are making to the strength, vitality, and prosperity of our state." Community college advocates are observing the month with social media posts using the hashtags **#CCMonth** and **#4everystudent4every community**.

PAID PANDEMIC LEAVE FOR EDUCATORS PASSES GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Gov. Pritzker is expected to sign a bill providing pandemic-related paid leave for fully vaccinated education personnel. [House Bill 1167](#) is an updated version of a previous bill that would have guaranteed paid administrative and sick leave to all K-12 and higher education employees, regardless of vaccination status. The bill passed the General Assembly in October 2021 with strong bipartisan support, but the Governor ultimately vetoed the measure, arguing that only those who are fully vaccinated should receive the benefits. If signed into law, the updated legislation would also restore any sick leave days used earlier this school year to vaccinated employees. The paid leave would be retroactive and extend to those caring for family members or loved ones stricken with the coronavirus. The vaccination requirement was the primary reason for opposition to the amended HB1167 this spring.

LAWMAKERS PASS BAN ON WITHHOLDING COLLEGE TRANSCRIPTS

[Senate Bill 3032](#) (the Student Debt Assistance Act) prohibits higher education institutions from refusing to provide copies of student transcripts either to a current or former student or that student's current or prospective employer. The proposed change comes as the Biden administration is considering limited changes to federal guidelines that have long encouraged colleges and universities to withhold transcripts

from anyone who is delinquent on repaying certain student loans. The bill passed the House and heads to the Senate for concurrence on a small technical amendment. A similar bill is pending in the Senate ([HB 4243](#)) that would prohibit public high schools from withholding a student's grades, transcripts, or diploma because of an unpaid balance in the student's school account.

SENATE BILLS TACKLE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY THROUGH TEXTBOOKS, TAX CREDITS

Senate Democrats have detailed three pieces of legislation that they say would be significant steps toward making college more affordable in Illinois. At a Statehouse press conference, Sens. Scott Bennett (D-Champaign), Laura Murphy (D-Des Plaines), and Laura Fine (D-Glenview) outlined their proposals, which they say will also help keep students in Illinois. The legislators noted that students who graduate from an in-state college are much more likely to stay and work in the state permanently. The three bills, however, are not moving this session:

- [SB 3856](#) (Bennett) would require all Illinois colleges and universities to provide Illinois high school graduates with free textbook rentals. Bennett said that this legislation is meant to bring stakeholders to the table to begin a discussion on the cost of textbooks and coursework materials. He also said that while he hopes the bill passes by the end of the year, he does not expect it to move before the General Assembly adjourns this month. In addition, Bennett said that the current model of making moderate revisions to textbooks every year or two and charging full price to students is unsustainable.
- [SB 1145](#) (Murphy) would provide up to a \$1,000 tax credit to families who are not eligible for Monetary Award Program grants if their student attends an Illinois university or community college. Murphy described the bill as a "bridge" that is targeted at helping middle-class families.
- [SB 819](#) (Fine) would allow students to use leftover MAP grant funds on books, supplies, and electronics. It would also allow them to spend excess funds on room and board, which would help address the growing problem of student homelessness and housing insecurity.

ORGANIZED RETAIL THEFT CRIME BILL

The Illinois Retail Merchants Association and the Illinois Attorney General have collaborated to create a comprehensive legislative package to address organized retail crime. The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Suzy Glowiak Hilton (D-Oak Brook Terrace), would treat smash-and-grab theft as organized retail crime, giving prosecutors greater authority to issue charges. The goal is to deter theft of retail merchandise by people or in association with others with the intent to re-sell the stolen goods.

CRIME PREVENTION PACKAGE INTRODUCED

Proposals filed late last week are requesting nearly \$240 million in funding increases for crime prevention and intervention initiatives, such as early childhood education and after-school programs. The package also includes grants for establishing anonymous tip lines across the state to help solve crimes, as well as expanding a witness protection program for those involved in bringing violent criminals to justice. In addition, a bipartisan Crime Reduction Task Force (comprised of legislators, law enforcement and legal and criminal justice professionals, and crime victims and witnesses) would develop a plan of action to reduce crime across the state and report its findings to the General Assembly and the Governor.

GAS TAX PROPOSALS

We have not yet seen language to lower any gas sales tax or motor fuel tax in the FY23 budget; it will likely be included in a last-minute budget implementation bill. However, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot has announced that the city will provide \$150 prepaid gas cards for 50,000 drivers in Chicago and \$50 prepaid transit gift cards for 100,000 riders. The program will cost a total of \$12.5 million.

SENATE DEMOCRATS PROPOSE TAX BREAKS

On Friday, April 1, Senate Democrats unveiled a legislative plan to refund \$1.8 billion to Illinois taxpayers as part of inflation relief that they say has been made possible by improving state finances. Much of the package (included in amendments to [SB 1150](#)) is in addition to tax breaks that Governor JB Pritzker laid out in his FY23 budget proposal, but many of the tax breaks are temporary.

Under the Senate Democrats' plan, the state would provide relief checks valued at \$100 per person and \$50 per child to state taxpayers making up to \$250,000 individually, or up to \$500,000 jointly. A household of four could see a \$300 check. The relief checks would likely come in late summer or early fall. Lawmakers estimated that more than 97 percent of state taxpayers would receive a check of some amount. The plan also wipes out for six months the state sales tax on groceries; stops a gasoline tax increase; provides property tax relief checks of up to \$300 that would be mailed to taxpayers; includes expanded economic aid for lower-income workers and increased tax credits for teachers and volunteer first responders; and halts the state sales tax on clothing, shoes and school supplies for 10 days in August to give consumers an economic boost for back-to-school shopping. As proposed, the sales tax would be lifted from August 5 to August 14.

RAINY DAY FUND

State Comptroller Susana Mendoza's [Fiscal Focus magazine](#) recently defended Gov. Pritzker's proposal to put \$800 million in the state's "rainy day fund." [HB 4118](#) would require the state to make automatic deposits into the fund whenever certain financial conditions are met.

Officially known as the Budget Stabilization Fund, it was created in 2001 as a reserve so that the state could pay its bills in a timely manner, especially during regular months of the year when revenues are lower than other months. The goal was to maintain a reserve equal to 5 percent of the state's annual revenues. Current law, however, requires deposits into the fund only when the state's general revenue estimates increase by 4 percent or more over the prior year, something Comptroller Mendoza said has not happened since the fund was created. Instead, transfers into the fund have been made only when the General Assembly makes a one-time appropriation in the budget.

COMPTROLLER RE-NAMES BILL BACKLOG 'ACCOUNTS PAYABLE' AFTER FINAL LOAN PAYMENT

Illinois has made its final short-term borrowing payment of \$297 million on the loans it took out to maintain operations during the 2015-2017 budget impasse, Comptroller Mendoza announced last week. As a result, the state has eliminated its bill backlog and is up to date paying its monthly expenses. The final payment comes months ahead of the June 30 deadline set by the legislature. The Comptroller notes that the payoff is in addition to the \$3.9 billion borrowed from and repaid to the federal government during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HEALTH INSURANCE NETWORK ADEQUACY

Following a subject matter hearing to discuss the ongoing contract negotiations between Springfield Clinic and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, Rep. Sue Scherer (D-Decatur) filed an amendment to [HB 1463](#) mirroring most of the language in her [HB 5729](#). The amendment removes the previous language regarding the Illinois Department of Insurance's authority to share findings with the Governor's office and the creation of a separate advisory council on network adequacy requirements. We expect HB 1463 to be heard in committee soon. The Department of Insurance had said they would file proposed rules on the 2017 network adequacy law last week, but we have yet to see them.

PRISONER REVIEW BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The Governor-appointed Illinois Prisoner Review Board determines whether offenders should be released from Illinois Department of Corrections custody and what the terms of their release should be. The board has seen heavy Republican scrutiny in the past year as the Senate repeatedly delayed confirmation hearings for several Pritzker appointees. One PRB member has resigned, and another was rejected by the Senate by a vote of 15-31 (13 Senators did not vote). The board has become a proxy for the larger political battle in Illinois over how to address crime heading into this year's elections.

ELECTRIC GRID RELIABILITY TASK FORCE

The Senate has advanced a measure ([SB 1104](#)) to create a task force to study electric grid reliability in light of the 2021 passage of the energy regulatory overhaul bill known as the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act. The unpaid, 33-member Illinois Regional Generation Reliability Task Force would examine the effect of state laws, including the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, on energy prices as well as grid reliability. It would also study ways to deploy new technologies and "improve" the power supply mix, among other tasks. It would report to the General Assembly by February 1, 2023, and each year thereafter.

SB 1104 passed 32-15 in a bipartisan vote, although several Democrats voted against the measure. It still needs approval in the House. Labor unions were among some of the prominent backers of the bill, while the Illinois Sierra Club opposed the measure because they disagreed with the taskforce makeup.

NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT BAN

A House committee has begun preliminary conversations about lifting the state's 1987 ban on new nuclear power developments in Illinois. Rep. Mark Walker (D-Arlington Heights) said that the cap was put in place at a time when the dangers of carbon emissions were not as clear as they are today. Nuclear energy does not emit carbon. Having the option to consider new nuclear developments, whether they are micro-reactors or large utility-scale plants, would be good to have as the state seeks to be carbon free by 2050. The discussion at the committee level was on a subject matter basis, meaning any decision to lift the cap would come at a future date.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE BILL

The Illinois Environmental Council is drafting an amendment to [HB 4093](#) that would remove the \$200,000 fee associated with permits in EJ areas and also remove all requirements associated with local siting. The IEC is adding the amendment after consulting with the Senate President's office and in hopes of keeping the bill moving this session. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency believes that removal of the fees is "problematic" for implementation. The business coalition has presented several recommendations for

the bill but has not received feedback from the proponents. HB 4093 has been returned to the Senate Assignments Committee, indicating that it will not move forward this session. It will assuredly return for consideration in either the fall 2022 veto session or next spring.

STATE PROVIDING \$309 MILLION MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE

The Illinois Housing Development Authority has announced that the Illinois Homeowner Assistance Fund will open on April 11 to help homeowners who have fallen behind on mortgage payments and related housing expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible households will be able to apply for up to \$30,000 in free assistance to pay past due mortgage payments, property taxes, property insurance, and delinquent homeowner and/or condo association fees. ILHAF is funded by \$309 million in federal funds allocated to the state by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

'FERTILITY FRAUD' BILL TARGETS REPRODUCTIVE MALPRACTICE

Newly filed legislation in the Senate aims to punish fertility and assisted reproductive health professionals who take advantage of families and substitute their own genetic material in order to achieve conception.

THOMPSON CENTER SALES AGREEMENT

Gov. Pritzker has announced that the state has finalized a purchase sales agreement for the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago with JRTC Holdings, LLC., stating that “not only saving taxpayers \$800 million but also adding vitality to Chicago’s LaSalle Street corridor by honoring the original design through a modern lens.” The financial closing and transfer of title on the property is anticipated to be completed in summer 2022. The state and JRTC Holdings are working together to finalize the floor plans and interior design.

#CCMonth

#4everystudent4everycommunity

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

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