

## ICCTA's Fall 2021 Veto Session Update

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By Jessica Nardulli, ICCTA Legislative Counsel

The Illinois General Assembly's fall 2021 Veto Session is scheduled for **October 19-21 and 26-28**. Even though lawmakers have already acted on bills vetoed and amendatorily vetoed by Gov. JB Pritzker, the House and Senate do need to approve a **Congressional district map** (see below for more information) and any other issue can be addressed during Veto Session. This year, however, a lighter load of legislation is expected, having just wrapped up the extended energy and climate negotiations. It is possible that some scheduled days could be canceled prior to or during the session.

That said, a few new bills have been filed in the last several weeks, including proposals responding to the recently passed Texas law that effectively bans most abortions in that state. So far, two Chicago lawmakers have filed bills inspired by the Texas law: one to expand [abortion access](#), and one that aims to rein in [gun violence](#). Both proposals could see discussion during the upcoming Veto Session.

State Reps. Michael Zalewski and Kam Buckner [filed a resolution](#) calling on lawmakers to reject any plan that would spend public money on a new stadium for the Chicago Bears. Sen. Robert Peters has said that he is drafting a similar piece of legislation.

Another possible issue includes amending the [Health Care Right of Conscience Act](#). The statute's language is so broadly written that, despite its original intent of shielding health care professionals from participating in treatments or procedures with which they were opposed as a matter of conscience (such as abortion and birth control), it is now being used to evade school vaccination/testing mandates. The Act now states that all persons have a right to refuse to obtain, receive or accept, or deliver, health care services and medical care, which includes testing. The Governor has called on the Democrat-controlled legislature to amend the Act to allow him to mandate vaccines and testing, but it is not yet known what any amendment would look like – whether the General Assembly would simply exempt vaccines or testing during a pandemic or if lawmakers would consider changing the whole law.

### **CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING**

Democrats in the Illinois House and Senate relaunched an online redistricting portal ahead of public hearings to gather input on the makeup of new congressional districts. The tool allows individuals to draw and submit proposed congressional boundaries for state lawmakers to consider as they make plans for redistricting. The map-making portal can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).

The Illinois House and Senate Redistricting Committees have also begun holding hearings to accept public testimony on new congressional and judicial subcircuit maps. **No proposed maps have yet been revealed**. The first hearing was last week, and another half dozen have been scheduled for the following seven days.

The parties to the lawsuit challenging the **state legislative maps** were in court last week. Discovery is ongoing but the upcoming calendar was also addressed. The Illinois State Board of Elections has been asked to file additional information this week about a **"drop dead date"** for having a new map in place to allow elections to proceed as planned. The next status hearing has been set for October 19. A trial date has not yet been set.

After the legal battles over the maps are concluded, we will begin to see politicians announce their future intentions -- such as state legislators seeking state-wide office, or someone from Congress running for Governor, for example. As a reminder, all state representatives and senators, all five state-wide elected constitutional offices, all congressional seats, and Senator Duckworth's seat will be on the ballot next year. **The Illinois primary election is scheduled for June 28.** Expect big money to flood the airwaves all next year (announced candidates for governor are already spending ad money).

### **UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE DEFICIT**

The state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund has a \$4.3 billion deficit. Interest payments are now accruing at 2.27% as the General Assembly lacks a plan to pay down the federal debt. In addition to the accruing interest, the state also has incentives to pay the debt built into law that increase employer tax payments and decrease claimant benefits beginning next year if the debt remains unpaid. Beginning in January 2022, the benefit period for unemployed persons claiming benefits shortens from 26 to 24 weeks, wage repayment drops from 47% to 42.4%, and employer tax rates increase 0.325%. The Illinois Retail Merchants Association estimates that these actions will add \$500 million in tax increases to employers and \$500 million in benefit cuts to claimants.

Lawmakers could pass legislation to push back the effective date of these cuts from January to later in 2022, but interest will continue to accrue on the \$4.3 billion deficit (and the deficit will likely continue to grow as high as \$5 billion next year). The state could also use some of the \$4-5 billion in unspent ARPA money from the federal government to pay down the Trust Fund deficit, but that decision would be part of next year's budget discussions.

### **COVID-19 UPDATE**

President Biden visited Chicago last week and used his speech to push businesses to mandate COVID vaccines or weekly tests. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, 82% of Illinoisan adults have received at least one dose of the vaccine and 64.5% are fully vaccinated; 54% of all Illinoisans are fully vaccinated. The statewide positivity rate is declining at 2.1%. Gov. Pritzker has not announced the metrics he will use to determine when it is appropriate to roll back the indoor mask mandate.

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

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