



Legislative Update

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SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE EXPECTED TO HEAR TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS AND CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION NEXT WEEK

The members of the Senate Education Committee were selected this week and include: Sen. O’Laughlin, Chair, Sen. Brattin, Vice-Chair, and Senators Arthur, Cierpiot, Gannon, Koenig, Onder, Razer, and Schupp.

The committee is expected to meet on January 19 to hear SB 23 (Koenig) and SB 25 (Eigel). The Association opposes both bills. Both bills include tax credit style voucher provisions that would divert public funds to finance private school tuition. Missouri NEA opposes this and similar proposals to divert public funds to private schools not subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, staff and parents as apply to public schools.

SB 25 also would expand sponsorship of charter schools by outside entities in many regions around the state. Missouri NEA opposes this provision and believes that charter schools should be sponsored by and accountable to the local school board. Charter schools should be subject to the same standards of transparency and accountability as are applicable to district public schools.

SENATE COMMITTEE TO HEAR COVID LIABILITY BILLS NEXT WEEK

The Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee will hear SB 51 (Luetkemeyer) and SB 42 (White) on January 19. Both bills pertain to liability protections for employers and other entities during declared emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Association has concerns regarding this type of sweeping liability waiver and opposes both bills as filed. Fundamentally, if no one is responsible, no one is safe. Among several concerns, the products liability waiver could put educators and many other workers at risk of using ineffective, inadequate or unsafe products if manufacturers have no responsibility to maintain high product standards during the pandemic.

HOUSE CANCELS SESSION FOR NEXT WEEK

The House has cancelled session activities for next week. House leaders noted that several members have test positive for COVID-19 and plan to return to session the following week. Concerns have also been raised about safety due to the possibility of potentially dangerous protests in state capitols around the nation next week as President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris are inaugurated.

GOVERNOR'S INAUGURAL

Governor Mike Parson was again sworn into office on January 11, 2021 in an inaugural ceremony at the State Capitol. Parson first assumed the position as Governor in 2018 after the resignation of former Governor Eric Greitens. Parson was elected Governor in November 2020. The Association encourages the Governor and legislature to work together this session to support Missouri's students and public schools.

The other statewide officials elected in November 2020 were also sworn in at the same ceremony: Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe, Attorney General Eric Schmitt, Secretary of State John Ashcroft and State Treasurer Scott Fitzpatrick.

HOUSE ADOPTS RULE CHANGES

The House debated and adopted HCS/HR 7 (Plocher) on January 12. HCS/HR 7 makes several changes to House Rules that regulate how the House conducts business. Important changes include:

- 1) Expanded law enforcement powers for the Sergeant-At-Arms including the power to arrest persons who "show disrespect to the House by any disorderly or contemptuous behavior in its presence during its sessions" in violation of Article III of the Constitution.
- 2) Procedures for committees to take remote testimony by phone or video from witnesses who request in advance to provide remote testimony. This rule also provides that written testimony may be submitted through the House website. The House rules also now require witness forms to be signed by the witness.
- 3) Creation of a Committee on Legislative Review that will review bills referred to it and determine whether proposed amendments or substitutes are "appropriate" and whether bills are technically correct.
- 4) Changes to the committee list, though no changes are made to the committees directly related to education topics.
- 5) Changes to investigation of complaints of unethical conduct by House members.

HOUSE CENSURES REP. WILEY PRICE

The House debated and adopted House Complaint 1 (Eggleston) on January 13. The complaint, specified as Ethics Complaint 20-001, calls for the censure of Rep. Wiley Price and specifies the consequences that will be imposed on Rep. Price. Following an investigation that lasted twelve months, the report on the complaint was unanimously approved by the House Ethics Committee. The committee found that Rep. Price's actions involving an intern and his legislative assistant and his conduct before the committee during its investigation to constitute ethical misconduct and conduct unbecoming of a state legislator of sufficient severity to warrant censure.

The House also debated and initially approved HA 1 (Taylor). If approved by a 2/3rds majority, HA 1 would have expelled Rep. Price from the House. However, the vote to approve the amendment fell

short of the 2/3rds vote needed to remove Rep. Price. HA 1 was then reconsidered and withdrawn before the original complaint was brought to a vote and approved.

By approving the complaint and its recommendations, the sanctions imposed on Rep. Price include censure, repayment of investigation costs, removal from committee assignments, a ban from leadership positions, and outside supervision of any employee working for Rep. Price. Rep. Price spoke during debate on the measure and said that he would accept the sanctions and that he planned to continue in office.

HOUSE COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Speaker Vescovo announced House committee chairs and majority party members, but minority party appointments have not yet been published. Once the committees are constituted, committee chairs will begin scheduling committee hearings. Many committees may hold hearings next week on priority bills. Speaker Vescovo is expected to release membership lists for House committees this week, probably on January 13. Once the committees are constituted, committee chairs will begin scheduling committee hearings, and many committees may hold hearings next week on priority bills. The MNEA Legislative Update will keep you informed on legislation affecting students and schools.

CONNECT WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AS AN MNEA EDUCATION ADVOCATE!

You're the expert! Tell legislators how legislation would affect you, your students, and your schools. As an educator, you're already knowledgeable about the resources and support students and your colleagues need.

You can help create a better future and support MNEA's legislative effort by becoming an MNEA Education Advocate. Due to the global pandemic, MNEA will not hold the regular schedule of in-person Legislative Forums and Capitol Action Days this year. Instead, MNEA EA's will join virtual back-home visits to connect with their elected officials.

Sign up now to receive training and support to connect with your elected official as an MNEA Education Advocate by visiting <https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/VolunteerActionCard.aspx>

USEFUL LINKS

MNEA Issues and Action: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/Issues-Action.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Action Center: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/LegislativeActionCenter.aspx>

MNEA Education Advocates Program (includes signup):
<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PoliticalActionProgram.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Updates (includes signup):
<https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/StateLegislativeUpdates.aspx>

MNEA Legislative Platform and Priorities: <https://www.mnea.org/Missouri/PlatformPriorities.aspx>

MNEA App: <http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/News/Download-the-Missouri-NEA-Mobile-App-Today-413.aspx>

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