



CAPITOL REPORT
DALE WRIGHT
DISTRICT 116
MISSOURI HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES



COMMITTEES

February 17, 2022

*CONSENT & HOUSE PROCEDURES
*CORRECTIONS AND
PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
*HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH
*PENSIONS

Dear Friends,



I had the opportunity and the pleasure to visit with our U.S. Congressman Jason Smith. We were able to discuss Vaccine Mandates, Redistricting, Medicaid Expansion and other issues that affect our Local Community and the rest of our State.

House Bills HB 1686 and HB 2358 & 1485 Meant to Prevent Vaccine Mandates

The Missouri House gave first-round approval to two bills designed to prevent Missourians from COVID-19 vaccination mandates.

HB 1686 states that public entities such as government agencies and public schools cannot require a COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of employment. It would also prohibit fines or other penalties based on an individual's vaccination status. Additionally, it allows an employee the right to raise a religious objection to receiving a vaccination.

The bill doesn't prevent citizens from receiving a COVID-19 vaccination. It doesn't prevent businesses from having a COVID-19 vaccination requirement. It does, however, forbid government mandates with certain exceptions, and gives clarity to Missouri businesses on how to offer religious and medical exemptions to their employees

The intention of the bill is to offer employers the right to set requirements of their employees in order to do what they think is safe while also respecting the rights of the employees, including their religious rights and their God given freedoms.

The House also approved **HB 2358 & 1485** to affirm the right of an employee to receive an exemption from a COVID-19 vaccine requirement if the employee requests one based on certain sincerely held beliefs. The bill clarifies the religious exemption which includes theistic as well as non-theistic beliefs. The bill requires an employer to provide reasonable accommodations for the request unless clear and convincing evidence proves it would cause an undue hardship to the business or be a direct threat to other employees or customers. The bill uses existing federal law to protect the rights of employees.

HB 2358 & 1485 also ensures an employee who is injured, disabled, or killed due to an employer-required COVID-19 vaccination would be compensated. The bill will treat injuries resulting from the vaccine as an occupational disease. Additionally, an employee terminated or discharged for failing to comply with a COVID-19 vaccination requirement would still be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Both bills require another vote in the House before moving on to the Senate for consideration.

Constitutional Amendment HJR 117 Gives Initial Approval to Medicaid Reform

Members of the Missouri House want voters to have the opportunity to decide if reforms should be enacted for the state's ballooning Medicaid program. Lawmakers gave first-round approval to a proposed constitutional amendment that make three key changes to the program, if voters agree.

The measure places reforms on our state's Medicaid program which are badly needed. Medicaid is a multi-billion dollar program that has grown exponentially to 40% of our state budget in recent years and is encroaching on our other budget priorities. This bill would enable us to manage Medicaid better and pose the question to the Missouri people if they'd like to approve it or not.

One proposed change clarifies the legislature's authority to appropriate funds based on population. It would allow lawmakers to decide how to appropriate funds for the Medicaid expansion population.

The Supreme Court's decision on Medicaid expansion last year stated we must have expansion population coupled with the mandatory population which is subject to appropriation. This bill enables us to uncouple those two parts of the program and appropriate for them independently. That could be very important in future years as Medicaid becomes prohibitively expensive and continues to encroach upon other priorities within our state budget.

Another provision puts work and community engagement requirements in place for Medicaid recipients ages 19 to 64. They would be required to work at least 80 hours each month, or participate in education, job skills training, community service, or other alternatives. The provision also allows the Department of Social Services to permit further exemptions from the requirements in areas of high unemployment, areas with limited economic or educational opportunities, areas that lack public transportation, and for good cause. Under the provision, the Department of Social Services is required to apply for a waiver from the federal government to put the work requirements in place.

The final component of **HJR 117** ensures our Medicaid benefits are provided only to residents of Missouri. Currently, Missouri is subsidizing the other states' Medicaid programs when a Medicaid recipient from Illinois, or perhaps Kansas, comes to Missouri, that service provider is being paid by that respective state's Medicaid program, and additionally, Missouri is adding to that payment and subsidizing those other states' Medicaid programs.

Missouri is the only state in the nation that provides a Medicaid extra add-on payment. The bill is meant to distribute funds so that we're keeping Missouri resources in a program that's paid for by Missourians in the state of Missouri and making payments available to those who are actually Missouri residents.

The proposed constitutional amendment requires another vote in the House before moving to the Senate.

House Members Approve Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act (HB 1713)

Missourians will have their right to assemble for religious services further protected under a bill that was given first-round approval by the Missouri House of Representatives. House members approved the Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act, which is in part a response to the closures of places of worship that have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill ensures that government entities in Missouri cannot close our places of worship. There are a few limited exceptions in the bill but the idea is to make sure some of the closures that were forced upon our citizens never take place again.

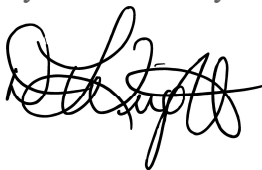
Under the bill, no public official can issue an order that has the effect of limiting or prohibiting a religious group or place of worship from holding religious services or meetings. This prohibition would not apply to emergency evacuation orders involving imminent danger from flooding, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, terrorist threats, civil unrest, or hazardous materials incidents. Once the imminent danger has passed, religious services would be allowed to resume.

Places of worship meet not only the spiritual needs of the population but also provide help to those in need in the form of food, shelter and other critical services. The data shows people who were able to attend religious services during the pandemic saw their mental health improve.

The bill now requires another vote in the House before moving to the Senate.

**VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL THIS WEEK WILL BE INCLUDED IN NEXT WEEK'S
CAPITOL REPORT!**

My best to all of you and Stay Safe during this winter storm!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. L. ...', written in a cursive style.