



CAPITOL REPORT

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Missouri House of
Representatives**



COMMITTEES

- *CONSENT & HOUSE PROCEDURES
- *CORRECTIONS AND
PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
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April 29, 2022



The first week in May is Teacher Appreciation Week

Thank You to all Teachers for the work you do for our Students!

Dear Friends,

With just two weeks left in this legislative session, Members of the House are finalizing the legislation that we feel is important for the constituents of Missouri. Following are several of the bills the House has passed and now await the Senate's approval.

House Bills Sent to the Senate

HB 2638 is the product of a process that began with the creation of the Interim Committee on Broadband Development. The committee conducted town halls across the state to take citizen input on the issue of high-speed internet access. Based on that input, the committee produced a report with five recommendations, most of which are contained in the bill. The bill establishes the Broadband Development Council to explore ways to expand access to broadband services; the potential for increased use of broadband for education, career readiness, workforce preparation and alternative career training; ways to encourage state and municipal agencies to

expand service to better serve the public through the use of streaming, voice over Internet protocol, teleconferencing, and wireless networking. The bill authorizes the Attorney General to seek the return of broadband funding from any provider that defaults or breaches agreements to deploy broadband. Additionally, it establishes the "Vertical Real Estate Act", which authorizes political subdivisions to erect towers and other broadband infrastructure as specified in the bill and to join or participate in public-private partnerships to effectuate the construction of vertical real estate and towers. The bill also allows any two or more political subdivisions to form a broadband infrastructure improvement district which shall have power to contract with broadband service providers and expand service using grants, loans, bonds, and user fees. The bill also modifies the provisions of the grant program to expand broadband Internet access in unserved and underserved areas of the state. Supporters say the goal is to provide efficient broadband coverage for Missouri using models from other states and by modifying existing broadband funding mechanisms.

HB 2140 is a wide-ranging elections bill that contains many necessary election security and integrity measures. The bill's sponsor said the bill "gives audit authority to the Secretary of State's Office if he or she determines there are nefarious activities. It also directs that there should be no changes made in an election 26 weeks preceding. That's very important." She added, "It tightens timelines for the Department of Motor Vehicles to process voter info. It directs them to send the applications electronically rather than by paper. It protects voter data. It directs DMV to not offer registration to non-citizens. It does many, many things on absentee, it tightens up absentee. It helps with what we all want in this body. It helps with voter integrity."

Some of the provisions contained in the bill would authorize the Secretary of State (SOS) to audit voter registration lists and require election authorities to remove improper names, remove obsolete references to ballot cards and requires voting machines to be air gapped as a security measure, and prohibit the state and its political subdivisions from receiving or expending private money for preparing, administering, or conducting an election or registering voters. Other provisions in the bill would allow registered voters to file change of address forms in person after the deadline to register to vote including on election day at the Office of the Election Authority if they provide a type of personal identification which involves photographic identification, prohibit payment for soliciting voter registration applications and requires registration with the Secretary of State's office for soliciting more than 10 voter registration applications, allow use of absentee ballots to vote in person with a form of personal identification as specified in the bill, and specify photographic identification requirements for voting a regular ballot, but allow use of provisional ballots with any type of documentation currently allowed for voting. Beginning January 1, 2024, the bill requires the use of a paper ballot and repeals electronic voting system language with certain exceptions for voting equipment used for the disabled. The bill also establishes the "Missouri Elections Sovereignty Act" which demarcates the distinction between federal and state elections and reserves the power of the General Assembly over those aspects of both state and federal elections granted to the states under the federal constitution as specified in the bill. Additionally, the bill authorizes any school district to adopt specified provisions prohibiting students of the male sex from participating in athletic activities reserved exclusively for females if such provisions are approved by a vote of the residents of the school district. The bill specifies that the Joint Committee on Education will study policies involving exclusively male and female athletic events and issue a report with findings and recommendations to the General Assembly before January 1, 2024.

House Advances Measures to Fight Human Trafficking (HJR 114 and HB 2307)

The Missouri House has approved and sent two proposals to the Senate that would create a new fine against individuals convicted of human trafficking offenses. The new fine would be used to fund efforts to fight trafficking in Missouri and provide treatment and support to its victims.

The House previously approved HB 2307 to create a fine of \$5,000 to be assessed against anyone found guilty of any human trafficking offense. The bill also creates the Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Fund to collect the proceeds generated by the fine. This week the House approved HJR 114, which is a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow voters to decide if the revenue generated by the new fine would be dedicated to efforts to fight trafficking and support victims of trafficking.

The bill's sponsor said the funding generated by the fine would be divided between two uses. He said, "The \$5,000 will be dispersed and allocated 50 percent towards the rehabilitation services of the victims of human trafficking, and 50 percent will be allocated towards the local efforts to prevent human trafficking such as education to law enforcement, hospitals, and schools."

He also explained the need for the change to the constitution. "Under the Missouri Constitution, all fines that are levied in Missouri go to the school districts," he said. "We're not taking away from the schools ... this is a new fine. We're just asking that it does not go to the schools in this case; that it go to the services that we're providing for."

The sponsor also noted the education his proposal would help pay for is something law enforcement is requesting. He said, "When they go out and do this education for law enforcement agencies they will have people come up and be very, very upset at the fact that had they had this information just two weeks ago that they might have been able to help somebody because now they are prepared and they know what to look for where they didn't two weeks ago, and they let somebody go because they didn't know."

The sponsor also pointed out that human trafficking is a big issue for Missouri and the state needs more ways to deal with it. He said, "Especially in the Kansas City area we are the heart, because we have I-35 going north and south, we have I-70 going east and west, and we are the pass-through of all human trafficking."

Supporting Emergency Medical Dispatchers (HB 2381)

The members of the Missouri House have advanced legislation to the Senate that would recognize the service of, as well as the difficulties faced by, emergency medical dispatchers. The House approved HB 2381, which would add dispatchers to state statute's definition of "first responders."

The sponsor of the legislation told his colleagues, "For the dispatchers that have always been there for us this is a step in the right direction, to acknowledge that they are the first responders that they are."

Supporters of the measure say dispatchers are vitally important and are the first link in the chain of emergency response. However, because dispatchers aren't considered "first responders," they aren't afforded benefits seen by EMTs, firefighters, police, and others. That includes health and retirement benefits, and also help to deal with the stress of their job. Lawmakers think that needs to change.

One of the bill's supporters said, "I was a police officer for 43 years, and in my wildest nightmare I can't imagine doing what those people do." He added, "The fact that we have failed to recognize them as an integral part of the first response community, I think, is a real disservice to them. They do their share and then some. They're often underappreciated. They're just a voice at the end of the radio frequency and people just forget how important they are. Without them a lot of people get hurt."

Because of the high stress they face, on top of regularly updated training and often low pay, advocates say people who work as dispatchers rarely do it for very long. Some areas of the state are having a hard time filling vacancies in call centers. Supporters say that by adding them to the definition of "first responders," they would be afforded more state benefits. This could be part of a larger effort to recruit and retain operators.

The bill also authorizes each political subdivision to elect to cover telecommunicator first responders as public safety personnel of the system. Additionally, the bill requires emergency medical dispatchers to complete a course approved by the Missouri 911 Service Board and complete any ongoing training required under the requirements of the 911 Training and Standards Act.

Senate Bill 820 Approved by the House

SB 820 is a wide-ranging utilities bill that establishes the Task Force on Distributed Energy Resources and Net Metering, to conduct hearings and research information related to net metering. The bill also specifies that no deed restriction, covenant, or similar binding agreement running with the land shall limit or prohibit the installation of solar panels or solar collectors, as defined in the act, on the rooftop of any property or structure.

During floor debate, the House added an amendment to the bill that would protect landowners from having their property unlawfully seized through the misuse of eminent domain. The proposal is a direct response to the Grain Belt Express project that has the authority to use eminent domain to acquire land in Missouri. The sponsor of the amendment told his colleagues, "We have to make a conscious decision if we're going to stand with Missouri farmers and ranchers. I am going to stand with the property rights. I am going to stand with landowners. I am going to stand with ranchers and I am going to stand with Missouri agriculture."

Some of the other amendments added by the House would help expand broadband internet access across Missouri, protect the private information of public utility customers, allow homeowners to install solar panels on their home without the need for special certification as long as they are following applicable building codes, create parity between traditional investor-owned utility companies and solar utility companies, establish the Task Force on Fair, Nondiscriminatory Local Taxation Concerning Solar Energy Systems, and establish the Missouri Nuclear Clean Power Act.

The bill now heads back to the Senate where the other chamber can either accept the changes made by the House or ask for a conference where representatives from both bodies will meet to iron out their differences.

I will continue to keep you updated as bills continue to move to the finish line. If you have any questions regarding any of the bills, please give my office a call at 573-751-3455.

VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL



April 19th

Enjoyed meeting and visiting with Members of the Three Eagles Distribution Center from Cape Girardeau



Always a pleasure for me to visit with people from back in the district. Enjoying a day at the Capitol were Frank and Tammy Flores from Camden County Linda Schaper from St. Francois County and Bernice Noble from Ste. Genevieve.
Welcome to the Capitol!

My Best To All of You,