

Kentucky General Assembly Weekly Report

Week 2

January 13th through January 16th (Legislative Days 5-9)

The second week of the 2020 General Assembly remained in first gear. Committees in both chambers saw more cancellations than hearings, but legislation - even high-profile bills - cleared the first hurdle in their path to eventually becoming law. Marquee among them is a measure that will allow Kentuckians to legally bet on sporting events. HB137, sponsored by Northern Kentucky Republican Adam Koenig, passed unanimously from the House Licensing & Occupations Committee on Wednesday morning. The legislation will allow players in Kentucky to bet on sports on their mobile device, after first registering at the many horse racing tracks (and NASCAR) tracks located across the state. This bill differs from last years in that it allows betting on college games featuring in-state programs. No floor vote is scheduled at this time, but proponents feel confident of its prospects within the House of Representatives.

Sports betting and medicinal marijuana are perhaps the two issues that most expose the urban-rural divide in the legislature. Wednesday saw both take a major step forward, as the Speaker of the House David Osborne signed on as a co-sponsor to a proposal legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes. That issue, too, has hurdles to climb before becoming law, but momentum is gaining.

The State Senate was the first to pass legislation off the floor. SB3, a Constitutional Amendment that would align Kentucky's existing statewide, off-year elections with presidential election years beginning in 2028, easily passed the Senate on Thursday. A lower-profile measure that is gaining notoriety also passed the Senate, SB11. That bill attempts to curb property damage by renters by applying new penalties to wanton damaging of residential property. Opponents of the bill question if it goes too far though. While the Senate was relatively short on Orders this week, it was the venue for some spirited floor discussion. "Marsy's Law," an amendment to the Constitution enshrining victim's rights, was passed by both the General Assembly and the voting public in 2018 but was struck down procedurally by the State Supreme Court. The Court effectively ruled that the language appearing on the ballot did not appropriately indicate the contents of the underlying legislation. That case, along with the now infamous Bevin pardons, have renewed the effort to finally pass a bill that passes Court muster. Northern Kentucky Republican Senator John Schickel took to the Senate floor on Wednesday to openly criticize the measure, indicating that it is the priority of a well-financed lobbying campaign from a wealthy Californian and not reflective of the will of or needs of Kentuckians. Sponsor Whitney Westerfield, a fellow Republican, defending the merits of the bill and reminded his critic that he, too, as Chairman, passes bills through his committee that are supported by interest groups. Such intraparty squabbling from the Senate floor is a rare occurrence, made particularly unusual by the fact that the bill was not being debated on the floor.

SB1, the "sanctuary cities" legislation, sponsored by Sen. Danny Carroll was not heard in committee this week. Carroll communicated to the public and his colleagues that a series of conversations and a subsequent meeting with an immigration attorney has motivated substantive changes to the legislation which better reflect the intent of Carroll and the bill's supporters. He committed to exempting specific agencies such as rape crisis centers and domestic violence centers, and he will make changes clarifying that the provisions apply to law enforcement agencies, not non-law enforcement public sector employees. Carroll did not establish a timeline for the bill's progress, but the amended version could pass through committee as early as next week.

Tuesday, Governor Andy Beshear gave his first State of the Commonwealth address. He offered a speech that while light on policy details struck a very positive note in contrast to his predecessor. In addition to reiterating his campaign promise to give teachers raises, he highlighted areas where he believes he can find common ground with the Republican majorities in the legislature including sports wagering as an avenue to new revenue and criminal justice reform. He will likely delve into more details when he gives his budget address on Tuesday, January 28th.

The House adopted some changes to its rules (which we identified last week), and it continues to amend long-standing practices. That body is now posting all bills in their committees of jurisdiction. Committee posting, until now, was an indicator of the chamber's intent to move legislation through the process. Often, they were forced to waive a rule that bills must be posted in committee for three days before a hearing. In order to avoid that procedure and the consternation it invited, all bills will be posted in committee. Chairmen still have discretion as to what bills will actually appear on their agendas.

Beginning Friday, Appropriations & Revenue Chairman Steven Rudy assumed the role of Majority Floor Leader, in the continued absence of Leader Bam Carney. Carney remains in intensive care in a Louisville hospital with an infection following a bout of pancreatitis.

Next is a short, four-day week as state government acknowledges the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday on Monday. Anticipate a slight disruption to the committee schedule.

Due to a delay in the LRC website, this week's bill trackers do not reflect Friday's bill filings.

Bill Tracker Live Link- http://www.hannah-ky.com/Report_Custom.aspx?sid=CLM%2bYvnHfOY%3d&rid=IHLxCPHb%2fd4%3d&oldFormat=False

(You will be able to track the progress of your bills anytime. This link will always remain active)

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