

Kentucky General Assembly Weekly Report

Week 3

January 21st through January 24th (Legislative Days 10-13)

Week 3 of the session was a four-day affair because of a holiday that was relatively short on activity but host to the passage of some meaningful legislation out of committee and off the floor. Committees appear to be cancelled more often than held, but that will no doubt begin to change. The legislature returns Monday with no scheduled breaks until the President's Day Holiday on February 17th.

The next major milestone on the calendar is the introduction of the Governor's proposed budget. On Tuesday evening, January 28th, Governor Beshear will unveil his proposal in an evening speech. The budget will take the form of a House Bill, which will be subject to weeks of scrutiny and, ultimately, revisions by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. The Governor's Office has kept details extremely close to the vest, and House Leadership continues to take a wait-and-see approach before preemptively critiquing Beshear's proposal. The deference is likely rooted in the belief that the Governor's campaign promises on spending - if delivered in full this biennium - simply outpace the revenues needed to fund them.

The Senate moved through their agenda by sending two more priority bills to the House. SB2, which would require some form of photo ID before counting a vote, passed along party lines Thursday evening. There is a fiscal note inherent in that legislation, as the Senate opted for the free issuance of some form of state ID for those who cannot afford it. Later that evening, Sen. Ralph Alvarado's SB5 passed the body. It would submit certain tax and fee increases from special taxing districts to county Fiscal Courts for approval. SB1, the controversial "sanctuary cities bill" remains in a holding pattern awaiting some changes before it moves through committee. SB4 will fundamentally restructure the governance model and project prioritization with the Transportation Cabinet. Although it has been given two readings, it has yet to be heard in committee. Other items of note, the Senate passed legislation that would align Kentucky's minimum age for tobacco purchases with the feds. Additionally, a bill to prohibit the denial of care for any infant who is born alive passed committee (SB9). A measure that would arm school resource officers (SB8) also awaits full floor action.

The House is moving along at a modest pace, passing several pieces of relatively non-controversial legislation through the body, including House Democrat legislation. Two major issues awaiting floor action are Rep. Adam Koenig's sports wagering measure (HB137) and Speaker Osborne's effort to assist the University of Louisville in its acquisition of assets from the failed Jewish Hospital System (HB99). The latter passed committee earlier this week on a decisive vote. That committee happened to be

scheduled within hours of the announcement of a rural hospital in the northeastern part of the Commonwealth closing its doors, further inviting the discussion of equity in the way the state handles failing rural and urban hospital systems. The House does not promote its low bill numbers as "priorities" in the way the Senate does, but there is no doubt a higher emphasis placed on a number like HB1. That bill has not yet been filed, but it will include policy changes aimed at addressing "benefit cliffs" - income or asset thresholds that kick people off public assistance, presumably disincentivizing the pursuit of more hours and income.

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