



Senate Debates Local Public Health Restrictions

SB 12 Was Laid Over After Several Hours of Debate

The Senate spent several hours Wednesday debating legislation that would limit the powers of local public health entities. **SB 12**, sponsored by Senator Bob Onder (R-Lake St. Louis), is the lead Senate bill aimed at modifying the process and permissible scope for local public health orders.

The sponsor described the bill as an attempt to rein in public health orders that shut down businesses during COVID-19 with little oversight or data. On the floor, Senator Onder dropped a floor substitute for the bill. This version prohibits political subdivisions from issuing orders that restrict the free exercise of religion during an emergency. Any public health order that restricts the operation or capacity of businesses or other gatherings could not last longer than 15 days without a two-thirds vote of the governing body for each extension. The bill permits one 15-day and two 7-day extensions before General Assembly approval is required. A simple majority of the governing body would be able to terminate orders at any time.

The bill would also reduce the property tax bills of businesses impacted by shutdowns or restrictions. Senator Andrew Koenig (R-Manchester), who has championed this provision, acknowledged a language tweak was needed to ensure this only applied to city- or county-wide shutdowns and not businesses who are closed due to a specific health violation.

Supporters of the legislation argued it would provide oversight and accountability for local public health departments. Other Senators raised concerns that it would usurp local control and hamper the ability of local public health agencies to respond to future emergencies. Debate between Senator Koenig and Senator Jill Schupp (D-Creve Coeur) turned heated when discussing masks and the level of risk assumed by Senators coming to the Capitol for session.

After several hours of debate, the bill was laid over. **SB 12** will remain on the informal perfection calendar where it can be brought up for debate at a later date.

In the House, a Rules Committee sent the four local public health bills back to the Special Committee on Small Business to fix language issues in the bills. The Rules Chair said he expects **HB 75**, sponsored by Representative Jim Murphy (R-St. Louis), to be passed out of committee again with language similar to Senator Onder's.

Dates of Interest

January

- **6** - First Day of Session
- **18** - No Session, Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- **27** - State of the State Address

March

- **1** - Bill Filing Deadline
- **12** - Legislative Spring Break Begins
- **22** - Legislature Reconvenes

April

- **5** - No Session, Easter Break

May

- **7** - Budget Bills Must be Passed
- **14** - Last Day of Session

Governor Signs Rental Assistance Budget Bill

This week, Governor Mike Parson signed [HB 16](#), the supplemental budget bill that provides spending authority for the state's portion of the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The state's portion of this funding is approximately \$324 million.

This funding will cover all localities with populations below 200,000 and St. Charles County, which did not apply for direct funds. Cities and counties with populations over 200,000 will receive a combined total of \$84 million directly from the federal government.

The State Assistance for Housing Relief (SAFHR) Program will provide rent and utility arrears for the period beginning April 2020 and up to three months of forward rent and prepaid utility assistance. Total assistance for any tenant cannot exceed 12 months. Information about the program is available from the Missouri Housing Development Commission [here](#). Tenant applications for assistance will open on February 15.

The website also includes a link to landlord applications for the [Emergency Rental Arrears Program](#), which opened January 4. Under this program, landlords can receive a one-time payment to cover up to six months of tenants' overdue rent.

News in Brief

- In response to inclement weather, the Senate will not be in session on Monday, and the House will only have a technical session. Monday's hearings in both Chambers are cancelled. If the Senate is able to return on Tuesday, Leadership will announce the session start time at noon tomorrow.
- The House Children and Families Committee heard two bills this week to begin to regulate youth residential facilities that are currently exempt from licensure due to a religious exemption. [HB 557](#), sponsored by Representative Rudy Veit (R-Wardsville), and [HB 560](#), sponsored by Representative Keri Ingle (D-Lee's Summit), require unlicensed residential facilities to register with the state and conduct background checks on employees. The bills also

create a process for Children's Division to petition a court to require facilities to present children to assess their safety. Last fall, news stories detailed reports of abuse at an unlicensed youth residential facility in southwest Missouri. The House Children and Families Committee held an interim hearing and released a report with recommendations for registration, background checks, and other standards.

- The House General Laws Committee heard HB 359, sponsored by Representative Ben Baker (R-Neosho), to allow the concealed carrying of firearms in places of worship with a permit. Baker stated the purpose of the legislation is to ensure that a person's Second Amendment rights are protected when they attend religious services. There was no testimony in support of the bill. The Missouri Catholic Conference testified in opposition as well as a number of individuals that submitted online testimony.
- Representative Shamed Dogan (R-Ballwin) will have two police reform bills heard in the House Crime Prevention Committee on Wednesday. HB 461 would require law enforcement agencies to adopt written investigation policies for officer-involved deaths. HB 876 contains a number of provisions, including limiting the use of chokeholds, expanding the definition of sexual offenses involving law enforcement, and requiring an annual report on disciplined officers. Elements of the police reform package from Senator Brian Williams (D-St. Louis) are now included in Senator Tony Luetkemeyer's (R-Parkville) SB 53. Senator Luetkemeyer's underlying bill prohibits law enforcement residency requirements in Kansas City. The bill, which is on the Senate calendar for floor debate, now also prohibits the use of chokeholds unless deadly force is authorized. Additionally, prior to commissioning an officer, the bill would require law enforcement agencies to request copies of information about the officer's previous departures from other law enforcement entities.
- In response to the cold snap, Governor Parson issued an Executive Order to temporarily ease regulations on transporting sources of residential heating fuel, including natural gas and propane. The order is meant to help ensure timely delivery of fuel during a period of heightened demand. The order is currently set to expire on February 21.



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