

## Legislature Passes Empowerment Scholarship Accounts

A top priority for school choice advocates was passed by the General Assembly this week. [HB 349](#), sponsored by Representative Phil Christofanelli (R-St. Peters), creates an Empowerment Scholarship Account program that would use tax credits to generate funds for students to use on educational opportunities outside public schools.

The bill authorizes tax credits for contributions to educational assistance organizations. These funds would be allocated as scholarships to low-income students or those with individualized education plans. Scholarship money could be used for a variety of educational expenses, such as private school tuition or tutoring services. The scholarships would only be available to students in charter counties or cities with populations over 30,000. Credits would be capped at \$50 million annually and adjusted for inflation until reaching a maximum of \$75 million.

If a student leaves a public school as a result of the program, the school would be able to continue to count them for funding purposes for up to five years. The provisions of the bill are contingent on the General Assembly appropriating at least 40% of full funding for public school transportation.

HB 349 was a top priority for Majority Floor Leader Caleb Rowden (R-Columbia) and Speaker Rob Vescovo (R-Arnold). In late February, the bill passed the House 82 to 71, meaning it received the exact number of votes required for passage. On Thursday, the bill was taken up in the Senate and came to a vote after only about fifteen minutes of debate. The measure passed 20 to 13. All Democrats voted against the bill as well as three Republicans, Senator Karla Eslinger (R-Wasola), Senator Sandy Crawford (R-Buffalo), and Senator Lincoln Hough (R-Springfield).

HB 349 will now move to the Governor's desk for his signature or veto.

### Dates of Interest

#### *January*

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

### Professional Registration Bill Advances to Governor

The Legislature truly agreed and finally passed a bill modifying licensure for various professions. [HB 476](#), sponsored by Representative Derek Grier (R-Chesterfield), passed the House 151 to 0 and the Senate 34 to 0.

The bill originally expanded Missouri's license reciprocity law

## 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

to include military occupational specialties. This was designed to help military personnel transition their skills to a civilian professional license.

In the Senate, an amendment was added to extend the sunset of the RX Cares program from 2019 to 2026. The RX Cares program, which is housed in the Missouri Board of Pharmacy, promotes medication safety and works to place medication disposal kiosks in pharmacies around the state.

Senator Greg Razer (D-Kansas City) added language to permit pharmacists to dispense HIV postexposure prophylaxis without a prescription. This is meant to promote timelier access to critical medication for individuals exposed to HIV. Another amendment directs Missouri to join the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact to streamline licensure across state lines. The first ten states to pass these provisions will have a say in the compact's governance.

## News in Brief

- Governor Mike Parson issued a directive that state employees are to return to in-person work no later than May 17. All state buildings are to be open and accessible to the public during normal business hours. The Governor is also scaling back National Guard support for mass vaccination sites.
- The Legislature truly agreed and finally passed the SFY 2021 supplemental budget and the SFY 2022 operating budget bills. These bills now move to the Governor's desk for his signature. Unlike normal policy bills, the Governor has the ability to line-item veto specific provisions in the budget bills. The Governor also has the authority to restrict funds in cases of revenue shortfalls.
- The General Assembly truly agreed and finally passed legislation impacting the duties and operations of public officials. HB 685 is sponsored by Representative Jason Chipman (R-Steelville). The legislation ensures County Treasurers have access to financially relevant documents, creates a process for Recorders to issue marriage licenses electronically, and removes the requirement that the Attorney General live in Jefferson City.
- A bill is moving to the Governor's desk that would exempt contact information for citizens signing up for newsletters or other alerts from disclosure under the Sunshine Law. The legislation also creates a reporting system for Children's Division employees to report concerns to the Office of Child Advocate. HB 362 is sponsored by Representative Bruce DeGroot (R-St. Louis).
- The Senate Committee on General Laws approved HB 1358, sponsored by Representative Ben Baker (R-Neosho), titled the "True COVID Liability Act." The bill prohibits the state or political subdivisions from issuing stay-at-home orders for individuals who have not tested positive for a disease or limiting the use of private property unless "extraordinary prevalence" of a disease is

proved. The bill also protects businesses or other premise owners from liability for exposure to a contagious disease.

- The gas tax bill passed by the Senate in March was approved by a House Rules Committee and has been placed on the calendar for floor debate. SB 262, sponsored by Senator Dave Schatz (R-Sullivan), gradually increases the fuel tax by an additional 12.5 cents per gallon. Taxpayers would be able to file for a refund to recoup the additional fuel tax paid.



*The Way We Work Says It All*