



WINTON POLICY GROUP

## House and Senate Committees Consider Broadband Bills

*Over One Million Missourians Lack Access to High-Speed Internet*

Broadband has become increasingly identified by the Governor's office and legislative leadership as a pivotal economic development driver for Missouri. According to the [Department of Economic Development](#), about 20% of the state, or 1.2 million Missourians, lack access to high-speed internet. This has implications for individuals' ability to operate businesses, use updated agricultural tools, benefit from healthcare innovations, and more. Several bills aimed at increasing broadband access in Missouri are moving through the committee process.

Legislation to extend the [Broadband Internet Grant Program's](#) expiration date will be heard in the Senate Commerce Committee on February 12. The Broadband Internet Grant Program was created in statute to leverage state resources to assist local partners in building broadband infrastructure in un-served and under-served areas. [SB 632](#), sponsored by Senator Dan Hegeman (R-Cosby), extends the program's sunset from 2021 to 2027.

The Legislature appropriated \$5 million for the grant program last year. Applications for this round of funds were due in January, and awardees are expected to be announced in March. For Fiscal Year 2021, the Governor's budget recommendations include \$10 million for the program.

[HB 1768](#), sponsored by Representative Louis Riggs (R-Hannibal), requires the Department of Economic Development to maintain a record of all federal grants awarded to entities for extending broadband in rural Missouri. In cases where funds are withheld or not distributed due to failure to meet performance standards, the department must work to have funds awarded to another eligible broadband provider in the state.

The bill passed the House Economic Development Committee unanimously and is scheduled for a vote in a Rules Committee on Tuesday. .

## Dates of Interest

### *January*

- **8** - First Day of Session
- **15** - State of the State Address
- **20** - No Session, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

### *March*

- **20** - Legislative Spring Break Begins
- **30** - Legislature Reconvenes

### *April*

- **13** - No Session, Easter Break

### *May*

- **8** - Budget Bills Must be Passed
- **15** - Last Day of Session

## House Committee Hears Vaping Bills

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee heard two bills related to vaping this week. Both were sponsored by Representative David Wood (R-Versailles), and the concepts were brought to him by students in his district.

Current law prohibits tobacco use in indoor areas of elementary and secondary schools as well as school buses. [HB 1682](#) would extend this prohibition to include vapor products. Missouri's statutory definition of tobacco excludes vapor products. In the hearing, supporters argued that setting a statewide policy on vaping in schools was an important step to discourage youth use of these products.

Representative Wood also presented [HB 1808](#), which requires the State Board of Education's standards for health and physical education to include instruction on the use and impacts of vapor products. Supporters contended education would help students understand the health risks and equip them to make better choices. Neither of these bills faced opposition in committee. Both HB 1682 and HB 1808 are scheduled for a vote on Tuesday.

Last November, Governor Mike Parson [announced](#) the creation of the [Clear the Air](#) initiative to increase

public awareness, especially among youth, on the health risks of vapor products.

## News in Brief

- Governor Mike Parson announced that Missouri is one of 13 states selected by the U.S. Department of Labor to receive additional technical assistance to help more citizens with disabilities obtain competitive, integrated employment. In September 2019, Governor Parson signed an Executive Order implementing the Missouri as a Model Employer initiative. The goal of this initiative is to increase the employment rate for Missourians with disabilities.
- The state's Budget Director announced net general revenue collections for January 2020 came in 7.4% higher than January 2019. Some of this increase may be due to the withholding issues in 2019 that caused revenues to come in later in the fiscal year.
- The House Transportation Committee is scheduled to hear HB 2280, sponsored by Representative Nate Tate (R-St. Clair). This bill authorizes the Department of Revenue to implement a secure digital driver's license program. This program would permit applicants to receive both a digital license as well as a card.
- The Senate Economic Development Committee is scheduled to hear legislation reforming the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. SB 549, sponsored by Senator Dan Hegeman (R-Cosby), places a cap on the state credits authorized in a fiscal year. The cap would be the lesser of \$123 million or 72.5% of the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits allocated to Missouri.
- The Department of Public Safety awarded funds to over 100 law enforcement agencies to help purchase equipment, such as radios, trauma kits, and ballistic vests. The grants totaled \$700,000.
- The Senate perfected a resolution that would send ethics and redistricting changes to voters on the 2020 ballot. This is in response to the changes made by Clean Missouri, a constitutional amendment passed by voters in 2018. SJR 38, sponsored by Senator Dan Hegeman (R-Cosby), bans lobbyist gifts and, more significantly, modifies the redistricting process. As perfected, SJR 38 eliminates the nonpartisan state demographer and gives redistricting responsibilities to Independent Bipartisan Citizens Commissions. When drawing district lines, partisan fairness and competitiveness are prioritized below all other criteria. The resolution requires a final floor vote to move to the House.