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LWV Legislative Bulletin
February 11, 2019

Information provided by members of the LWVMO Legislative Committee and the Missouri Budget Project.

HOUSE PASSES ETHICS BILL

The House gave final passage (Third Reading vote) to HB 445 (Dogan) on February 7 by a vote of 103-47. The perfected bill limits lobbyist gifts to elected and appointed local officials, including lobbyist gifts to school board members and superintendents, incorporates revolving door policies and campaign contribution limits for local officials and changes the Sunshine law.

The House adopted an amendment that weakens the state's open records law, also known as the Sunshine Law. Missouri's Sunshine Law declares that it is the public policy of this state that meetings, records, votes, actions, and deliberations of public governmental bodies be open to the public unless otherwise provided by law. Further, the Sunshine Law shall be liberally, and its exceptions strictly, construed to promote this public policy. To respect this policy, any changes must be carefully worded and narrowly drawn to serve a specific purpose.

HA 3 (Schroer) would amend the Sunshine Law with a broad exemption to allow all governmental officials to close any records pertaining to "constituent" communications regarding any request for information or assistance. This provision is especially broad when applied to school board members. Since nearly all school board members are elected at-large, this amendment could allow school board members to close communications with any person in the district, since everyone in the district is a "constituent." HA 3 also allows an official to close any document received or prepared by or on behalf of the official and consisting of advice, opinions and recommendations in connection with decisions made by the public body.

League would oppose this amendment as undermining the transparency reforms of CLEAN Missouri. Be sure your senator knows that this amendment should be struck from this bill when it comes before the Senate.

PRIMARY ELECTIONS

The House Elections Committee heard HB 26 (Stacy) on February 6. The bill would require established political parties to create a closed primary system where only voters registered for that party would be able to vote in a primary election. For primary elections in 2021 and thereafter, the bill would limit primary voters to those contained on lists created by the Secretary of State at least six months prior to a primary election. League opposes barriers that reduce access to voting and participation in

the political process by all eligible citizens. HB 26 appears to prevent citizens from voting in primary elections if they move within six months prior to the election.

EDUCATION

Often bills pertaining to education, whether early childhood, K-12, or higher education comprise a large part of legislation filed each year in Missouri, sometimes as much as 50%.

Although many of these may be of interest to League members, many of whom are or have been teachers, the legislation *LWVMO will report on mainly deals with League priorities regarding education: adequate funding of public education that is accessible and responsive to all students and protecting the health and safety of students.*

Because of this position, LWVMO has adopted positions opposed to expansion of charter schools without accountability to locally elected school boards and any fiscal measures which would take public funds and give them to private schools, including tax credits, vouchers, or scholarships or other means of redirecting public funds away from public schools. Such efforts result in less state funding for public education.

CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee heard HB 581 (Roeber) on February 5. The bill would allow charter schools to be sponsored by outside entities (other than the local school board) and operate in districts around the state. The committee is likely to take HB 581 up for a vote next week. SB 292 (Eigel), a similar bill, will be heard on February 12 in the Senate General Laws Committee.

League is opposed to both.

TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS

The Senate Ways and Means Committee approved SCS/SB 160 (Koenig), a tax credit voucher proposal, on February 5. HB 478 (Christofanelli), a similar bill, will be heard in the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee on February 12.

The bills would each create a tax credit for contributions to largely unaccountable third party "scholarship organizations" that would hand out scholarships that allow a student to attend a private or home school or pay tuition to a different school district or a charter school. The SCS/SB 160 reduces the total cap from \$50 million to \$25 million per year.

League is opposed to vouchers that would take money away from public schools.

From the Missouri Budget Project:

Another Troubling Tax Cut

On Tuesday, February 12, at 8 a.m., the [Senate Ways & Means Committee](#) will hear a proposal that would:

- Further cut the individual income tax
- Increase the state sales tax rate, but cap the total combined state and local sales tax
- Implement a non-refundable Working Families Tax Credit (similar to the Earned Income Tax Credit)

While a state Earned Income Tax Credit is a targeted tax credit for workers with low wages, the other components of [Senate Bill 52](#) are troubling and would make Missouri's tax structure even more regressive.

The Committee will meet Tuesday, February 12 at 8 a.m. in the Senate Lounge.

Restrictions to Medicaid

The [Senate Seniors, Families, & Children Committee](#) will hear a bill on Wednesday that could cause additional Missourians to lose access to health coverage through Medicaid. [Senate Bill 76](#) (Sater) would compel Missouri to apply for a waiver to allow the state to institute work reporting rules - which in Arkansas have been tied to more than 18,000 Arkansans losing coverage since August.

Medicaid eligibility for parents in Missouri is the **third lowest** in the country, and adults without children are ineligible entirely.

The Committee will meet Wednesday, February 13 at 8 a.m. in the Senate Lounge.