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LWV Legislative Bulletin
February 15, 2019

CHARTER SCHOOL EXPANSION BILL ADVANCES

The House Rules - Administrative Oversight Committee voted to approve HCS/HB 581 (Roeber) on February 14. 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 bill will be placed on the House calendar for floor debate, and debate could occur as soon as next week

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee voted 8-5 to approve HCS/HB 581 on February 12. SB 292 (Eigel) a similar bill was heard on February 12 in the Senate General Laws Committee.

ACTION ALERT: contact your State Representative and ask them to oppose HCS/HB 581! Talking points:

Charter schools should be subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, parents and staff as are applicable to traditional public schools. HB 581 does not enact these reforms.

LWV opposes the bill.

GUN LEGISLATION - In U.S. Congress:

Bipartisan legislation, HR 8, that requires checks for all firearms sales, is advancing through the U.S. House of Representatives, and a vote is expected the week of Feb. 25.

ACTION ALERT: Please contact your U.S. Representative to enlist support for this legislation.

From fastdemocracy.com: **Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019, to require a background check for every firearm sale. Crime and law enforcement; Crime prevention; Criminal justice information and records; Firearms and explosives; Licensing and registrations; Retail and wholesale trades.**

If you are interested in advocating for Missouri gun safety legislation, please contact Renee VanErp LWV/KCJCP at rfvanerp@yahoo.com. More than 30 bills have been introduced in the 2019 session.

TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee heard HB 478 (Christofanelli) on February 12. The bill is a tax credit voucher proposal similar to SCS/SB 160 (Koenig). SCS/SB 160 was approved by the Senate Ways and Means Committee last week and is now on the Senate calendar awaiting floor debate.

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.

LWV continues to vigorously oppose diversion of public funds to unaccountable third-party bureaucracies or to private and home schools that are not subject to public school standards.

SUNSHINE LAW

The Senate Government Reform Committee heard SB 132 (Emery) on February 12. The bill allows closure of certain constituent and legislative records of members of the General Assembly. The language is overbroad and LWV opposes the bill. Missouri's Sunshine Law requires that governmental meetings, records, votes, actions, and deliberations shall 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.

INITIATIVE PETITION REQUIREMENTS

The Senate Local Government and Elections Committee met on February 13 and heard three SJRs pertaining to signature requirements for initiative petitions. Under current law, initiative petitions proposing constitutional amendments must be signed by 8% of the legal voters in each of six of the eight Congressional districts and initiative petitions to amend statute must be signed by 5 percent of those voters.

Each of the three measures increases the signature requirements, and two of the measures would also require a supermajority vote for approval of an initiative petition.

LWV opposes these measures that would make it harder and more costly, for citizens to bring forward relevant policies through the initiative process.

SJR 1 (Sater) requires petitions to amend the Constitution to be signed by 15% of the legal voters in each of all eight Congressional districts. SJR 7 (Cierpiot) requires initiative petitions to amend the Constitution be signed by 5.8 percent of the legal voters in each of all eight Congressional districts and initiative petitions to amend statute must be signed by 3.6 percent of such voters. SJR 11 (Burlison) requires petitions amending the Constitution to be signed by 8% of the legal voters in each of all eight Congressional districts. SJR 11 also requires petitions to receive a two-thirds majority vote to be adopted. SJR 1 requires a two-thirds majority to be adopted except for petitions to repeal an amendment adopted through the initiative petition process prior to December 2020.

NONPARTISAN COURT PLAN

The Senate Government Reform Committee heard SJR 3 (Hegeman) on February 12. This proposed constitutional amendment, if approved by the qualified voters of this state, provides that when a judicial vacancy occurs in a court under the Nonpartisan Court Plan, the Governor shall appoint the new judge from a list of names of all qualified applicants, submitted by a nonpartisan judicial commission, rather than from a list of only three names. The number of nominees on the list is not limited but shall include at least three names.

LWV has long supported the Missouri Nonpartisan Court Plan and is not in favor of these changes.

TAXES

The committee met on February 12 and heard two bills:

- 1) SB 52 (Eigel) regarding several state taxes. The bill lowers the top state income tax rate by an additional 1.1% (eventually creating a top rate of 4%), creates a state earned income tax credit, raises the state sales tax by two cents (from 4.225% to 6.225%) and caps the total of state and local sales taxes at 8.775%, though existing local taxes that exceed the total may continue.

The combination of many large tax changes, coupled with the unknown impact of recent federal and state tax changes, make it difficult to assess the likely fiscal impact of the bill. The bill may ultimately reduce state revenues that are needed to fund public education and other vital services.

- 2) SB 108 (Koenig) to modify provisions relating to tax increment financing (TIF). The bill would require an independent impact study that is not conducted by the redevelopment proponent, redefines the terms for eligible areas and conditions, limits retail TIFs to retail infrastructure unless the project is in a blighted area or conservation area and prevents a new TIF in a vacant, unimproved or agricultural property, also known as a "greenfield" area.

These changes will increase public accountability of the local TIF process that can affect local school revenues, so LWV should support these changes.