116TH INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY ★

SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

NEWS RELEASE

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Week in Review at the Indiana General Assembly
State Senator Karen Tallian, D-Portage

INDIANAPOLIS—State lawmakers worked through major end-of-session deadlines this week. The Senate completed its consideration of House-passed bills and vice-versa. The rest of session will focus on negotiating differences between House and Senate versions of bills during joint conference committees. Compromises will be sought on a myriad of issues such as tightening the ethics rules for the legislative and executive branches, providing additional aid and jobs for the state's unemployed, and establishing redistricting guidelines for the drawing of new legislative and congressional districts in 2011. This brief summary highlights some of the action taken by the Senate this week.

Property tax billing process – A measure which would require a uniform semi-annual payment schedule for property tax bills is moving through the process. House Bill (HB) 1059 would provide property owners with proper notice of the tax amount due on their properties and maintain a consistent schedule for bills. The measure would require counties that anticipate being behind schedule with spring tax bills to send provisional tax bills by April 1 in which 50 percent of the previous year's total tax liability would be due by May 25. If the final property tax bills could not be determined by fall, the remaining 50 percent of the previous year's bill would be collected by November 10. If the final amount for the current year can be determined, a reconciliation bill for the remainder of the current year's taxes would be issued and due in November. This legislation will not only help homeowners to better budget for their property taxes, it will also help local governments to develop more accurate operating budgets and avoid taking out millions in loans with costly interest rates. The bill returns to the House for consideration of Senate amendments. Tallian sponsored this bill and worked to successfully move it through the Senate.

Bankruptcy exemptions – HB 1021 provides that a debtor's Indiana earned income tax credit is property that would be considered exempt under the bankruptcy property exemption statute if this bill becomes law. Current law provides only that a debtor's federal earned income tax credit is exempt property. The bill now returns to the House for final consideration. Tallian co-sponsored this bill.

Township government reform – Under HB 1181 the legislative and fiscal responsibilities of township boards would transfer to the counties beginning in 2013. The bill also prohibits nepotism by township officers and requires additional expense reporting by township trustees to increase transparency. For positions held before July 1, 2010, the bill would not require termination of a relative employed in township government until January 1, 2015. This legislation now heads back to the House of Representatives for consideration of changes made to the bill by the Senate.

Aging Hoosier population – a proposal urging the creation of a summer study committee to address the needs of the state's aging population advanced this week. Senate Resolution 22 would direct the study committee to identify best practices to provide community infrastructure, features and services that will locally support residents through the aging process. The study is motivated by an initiative, Communities for a Lifetime, endorsed by AARP Indiana, IU Center on Aging and Community, and the Indiana Association of Area Agencies on Aging. State adoption of a similar community model would help local communities better address basic needs such as housing, mobility, accessible services to optimize physical and mental health, how to maximize independence for those with frailty or disability, and the promotion of social and civic engagement. U.S. Census statistics for 2008 indicate that nearly 1.65 million Hoosiers, or one-fourth of Indiana residents, are between age 45 and 65. Another 813,000 residents are over age 65.

Bills advance to Governor - Several bills approved by both chambers now proceed to the governor for final consideration. Once received, the governor has seven days to sign a bill into law, allow the bill to become law without his signature, or veto the legislation.

Legislation which gained unanimous approval of both chambers will benefit laid off public safety officials. HEA 1194 will extend the reinstatement rights of laid off police officers and firefighters from three to five years. Once enacted, the bill will allow more laid off public safety officials to be rehired once the economy begins to rebound, which would reduce local government expenses associated with training and certification.

As of July 1, 2011, House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1061 directs the $2 county identification security protection fee to be divided up as follows: $1 into the County Recorder's Records Perpetuation Fund; $0.50 into the county Identification Security Protection Fund; and $0.50 into the county Elected Officials Training Fund. If signed into law, all counties will be required to establish the training fund to provide training for county elected officials. The bill would also require training for elected Circuit Court Clerks.

Lawmakers also unanimously supported HEA 1165 which will protect a veteran's service-connected benefits from being seized through legal action to collect a debt. The bill takes what is already federal law and places it into state statute.

The public would no longer be able to access handgun license information contained in a statewide database under HEA 1068. Stipulations in the legislation allow information concerning an applicant for or a person who holds a license to carry a handgun to be released to law enforcement or to determine the validity of a license to carry a handgun. In addition, the bill stipulates that general information concerning the issuance of licenses to carry handguns in Indiana may be released to a person conducting journalistic or academic research, but only if all personal information that could disclose the identity of any person who holds a license to carry a handgun has been removed from the general information.

To stay informed about legislation moving through the General Assembly or to track legislation, log on to www.in.gov/legislative/.This site provides complete bill information as well as committee hearing dates and agendas. From this site, you can also tune in to House and Senate floor debate as well as some committee hearings.

Citizens can stay current on legislation scheduled for action through a free online program available at www.BillWatch.in.gov. Track up to ten bills and receive e-mail notifications only when action is taken on those bills.

Visit my Senate web site at www.in.gov/s4 and subscribe to receive periodic e-mails about the major issues facing us this year. The Senate Democrats are also providing multimedia updates on the daily activities in the Senate at The Briefing Room and Twitter updates at @INSenDems. Personal contact with constituents has a direct impact on the legislation we consider and what ultimately becomes law. Feel free to contact me with your comments and concerns regarding pending legislation or if I can provide any assistance.

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