Legislative Update

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The Condensed Session

The Illinois General Assembly returned to Springfield on May 20 for the unique COVID-19 Special Session that was limited to only seven issues (listed below) to be considered in only a few days. This was the first time since March 5 legislators had met in-person in Springfield. Prior to meeting in Springfield, legislators had been meeting virtually in newly assigned working groups centered on several pending issues related to difficulties associated with COVID. No voting took place in these working groups, instead they provided recommendations to the entire body.

Special precautions outlined by the Illinois Department of Public Health were implemented. The Senate met in the Senate Chambers at the Capitol, but individual Senators could only come to the Senate Floor when needing to speak on an issue and to vote, and no more than 10 legislators were allowed to be on the floor at the same time.

The House of Representatives rented the Bank of Springfield Convention Center a few blocks away and requested a set-up that included 118 desks set six feet apart equipped with voting buttons, limited public and lobbyist access, and masks to be worn at all times. In addition, no legislator was to have direct contact with anyone when not in session, and to test and quarantine themselves for seven days following session.

With all of these arrangements in place, the legislature was able to return to Springfield and conclude a highly condensed session into four very long days. They addressed their seven issues they outlined for the Special Session:

1. COVID-19 pandemic or other disasters
2 State Budget and its implementation
3. Economic recovery, infrastructure projects, and funding
4. The explanation, arguments for and against, and the form for constitutional amendments, as required by the Illinois Constitution Amendment Act
5. Laws or authority scheduled to be repealed prior to June 1, 2021
6. The General Election and State Board of Elections
7. The Hospital Assessment Program

While the legislature did pass a spending plan for Fiscal Year 2021, which is always the top priority, many concerns remain over if the budget is "truly" balanced. The main reason for this concern is due to the uncertainty associated with the State's revenue. Fallout from COVID-19, including business closures, increased unemployment, and changes in consumer spending, make it difficult to predict how much money the State will collect from taxes and fees. Adding to the uncertainty is unanswered questions about how much the federal government will assist Illinois. Everyone anticipates that legislators may need to make budget adjustments during the fall veto session.

Clearly, as everyone will confirm, the final four days of this session were like no other session in Illinois' history as strict health guidelines were followed in order to minimize COVID-19 exposure. For those hoping to see a relaxing of Governor Pritzker's stay-at-home orders or his plan to re-open Illinois, they will likely be disappointed. Neither of these issues were addressed directly. However, after mounting pressure by the public and many legislators, the Illinois Department of Public Health's emergency rule to charge business owners with a misdemeanor for violating the stay-at-home order was rescinded.

IL-HPCO Legislative Action

Pediatric Palliative Care

IL-HPCO and GIPPC continue to seek funding for a pediatric palliative care program. A majority of legislators want to fund this vital program. Now more than ever it is important that these children not be in a hospital which puts them at a higher risk for contracting the coronavirus. Unfortunately, we are working against a budget like no other budget where where Illinois must reduce current spending and borrow up to $5 Billion in order to get through Fiscal Year 2021 which begins on July 1, 2020. Over the summer please contact your legislators either (in-person, text or email) to let them know what funding Pediatric Palliative Care would mean for Illinois. IL-HPCO is always happy to help you make contact with your legislators, please contact us.

POLST

IL-HPCO often works in partnership with the efforts to reduce barriers to using POLST especially as our society becomes more mobile. This past year, IL-HPCO supported Senate Bill 3523 introduced by Senator Sara Feigenholtz (D/Chicago) that would remove the witness requirement. Removing the witness signature from the IDPH Uniform POLST Form does not change the protections authorized under the HCSA. Especially during the (cont.p.8)