

Your Capitol Voice
Rep. Bobby Kaufmann

The first funnel deadline has come and gone. We can now focus on the bills that have a legitimate chance of passage and becoming law. This week I will write about four bills. I have heard from a lot of you back home about these issues. These bills are not in their final forms – any live bill can now be amended at any point along the process of becoming a law. I wanted to report progress on these issues back to you.

Health Care – There continues to be a crisis for 20,000 Iowan's who have no health insurance because they are priced out of the individual market. The Affordable Care Act is very restrictive when it comes to letting states be flexible with healthcare. This week the House Commerce committee took a first step to provide Iowans with some relief from unaffordable health care products on the individual market. The committee considered HSB 637 which would provide the option of purchasing a health benefit plan. These plans would be sponsored and administered by Iowa-based organizations. Health benefit plans act like insurance and are subject to oversight by the Insurance Commissioner. It is estimated that for individuals who do not qualify for a subsidy, these plans would be less than half the cost of plans available on the individual exchange

Mental Health – The Human Services Committee passed the initial draft of our mental health bill. This bill focuses on the policy and intent side. The level of funding will be something I will report back to you when the Appropriations Committee begin formulating their budget. The policy bill focuses on a few themes:

- Expanding services along the continuum of care to include evidence-based preventative services to deescalate mental health patients before crisis and to treat patients in the proper setting
- Removing the statewide sub-acute bed cap, and allowing these facilities to transition individuals to a lower level of care before they are prepared to return home
- Ensuring long-term sustainable funding for mental health services as Medicaid covered services
- Improving communication and processes between mental health professionals and law enforcement
- Allowing mental health providers, rather than judges, to make mental health care determinations in the least restrictive environment

SAVE Extension – The penny sales tax that was voted on by all 99 counties for our school infrastructure needs is due to expire in 2029. Many of our schools infrastructure projects require bonding commitments longer than 2029. Last week the Education committee passed another 20 year extension. The bill also provides some accountability measures for the funding, ensuring that voters have options to see and block use of these funds on projects that the public may view as unnecessary, such as athletic facilities. It also provides a larger transfer to a fund (PTER – Property Tax Equity Relief) that helps districts with low property value and high property tax rates, providing relief for the property tax payers in those districts. And the bill places more emphasis on ensuring that SAVE dollars are used to pay down existing debt within the district.

Animal Abuse – HSB 608 addresses animal abuse and it increases the penalties for animal abuse, torture, and neglect. Too many people are caught severely abusing their cats or dogs only to be given a slap on the wrist. I firmly believe that those who have the mindset to torture a kitten or a puppy will graduate to hurting people. This bill does not involve or include livestock which is a completely different code section with its own set of rules.

Capitol visitors: Tim Reimers, Mary Iossi – Durant; Jennie Embree, Jodi Yeggy – West Branch.

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