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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

**With Budget Negotiations on the Horizon, other Measures
Vie for Immediate Legislative Action**

As the Capitol Rotunda was filled with the sound of Kentuckians rallying for various causes this week, legislators intensified the level of activity to ensure their legislation received proper consideration before the biennial budget takes center stage.

Members of the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee moved to send House Bill 33 to the full chamber. Public universities would be provided an interim approval process for certain cash-funded capital projects, allowing the schools to obtain authorization for construction if the General Assembly is not in session.

One measure that has garnered a considerable amount of attention for the past several sessions was once again approved by the House Elections, Constitutional Amendments and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee. House Bill 70 would place a constitutional amendment before the voters of the Commonwealth which, if approved, would automatically restore the voting rights of non-violent felons.

All public high schools would be required to provide seniors with voting information through legislation approved by the House Education Committee. The information detailed in House Bill 212 would include how to register to vote, how to vote in an election using a ballot and how to vote using an absentee ballot. Additionally, teachers would be given the flexibility to disseminate this material as they see fit.

Following the lead of other states, the House Health and Welfare Committee passed House Bill 285. This legislation would set forth an all-encompassing awareness campaign in an effort to increase education and prevention of Pediatric Abusive Head Trauma (PAHT). Numerous groups, such as prospective adoptive parents and medical professionals, would be required to complete training in the dynamics, recognition and prevention of PAHT. Additionally, the Department of Corrections would make available a course relating to PAHT prevention to educate inmates on methods to ease a crying infant and demonstrate the physical effects of shaking or slamming an infant.

House Bill 282, which easily cleared the House Banking and Insurance Committee, would prevent healthcare providers or anyone working on their behalf from soliciting auto accident victims within 30 days of being injured. Perpetrators would be guilty of a misdemeanor offense punishable by up to one year in jail.

To address an issue that affects our citizens in rural Kentucky, my colleagues and I approved House Bill 142 by a vote of 94-0. This legislation would waive the state law that requires school bus drivers and other classified school employees to have a high school diploma or GED. The issuance of waivers would be decided by the state Board of Education on a case-by-case basis and would only apply to current employees who have proven to be competent in their job performance.

In an effort to further protect our children, the House approved legislation that would facilitate schools and daycare centers in their enforcement of domestic violence orders. House Bill 222, passed 98-0, would allow for a minor's full name to be included in custody agreements instead of only their initials. By doing so, the child can be properly identified and the details of the order carried out to the fullest extent.

House Bill 207, given passage 98-0, would punish inmates who do not return immediately from work release by creating the criminal offense of failure to return to custody. Violators who are incarcerated due to a misdemeanor offense would be charged with a Class A misdemeanor, while those convicted of a felony would be charged with a Class D felony.

Crafted as a reaction to General Motors and Chrysler's decision to close numerous dealerships in recent months, my colleagues and I were glad to support House Bill 217 by a vote of 98-0. The establishment of new car dealerships or the relocation of any existing dealership would be prohibited within a ten-mile radius of a former dealership closed by the manufacturer. The closed dealership would then have the possibility to re-emerge as a viable business.

A bill intended to provide more treatment for approximately 100 of Kentucky's children now receiving care out-of-state passed the House 94-0. House Bill 231 would authorize the expansion of psychiatric treatment facilities for mentally disturbed youths to include a new category for the most severely unstable youths who are currently in out-of-state facilities because their conditions are deemed too serious for treatment in Kentucky. The bill also sets forth requirements for operation of the facilities by qualifying applicants.

On Friday, my colleagues and I also passed House Bill 115. I am proud to sponsor this legislation that would reduce stress with custody issues in divorce settlements. The bill now awaits action in the Senate.

Eventually, the budget bill will arrive on the House Floor and consume much of our time. Many late nights and hard choices lie ahead for the 2010 legislature given this year's significant shortfall, uncertain revenue and unemployment rate. Even though there are many questions that will require difficult answers, I believe effective legislating requires public participation. I encourage you to contact me with your thoughts.

Please know I am available at home or through the Legislative Message Line at 800-372-7181. A taped message containing information on legislative committee meeting schedules is available by calling 1-800-633-9650. For bill information, please call the Bill Status Line at 1-866-840-2835. Those with hearing impairments may leave messages for me by calling the TTY message Line at 1-800-896-0305. If you have internet access, you may e-mail me at ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov or keep track through the Kentucky Legislature home page: www.lrc.ky.gov.

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