

Contact: Lindsay Orange
Communications Director
House Republican Leadership
(502) 564-5393

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

House Members Shift Their Attention from Budget to Other Key Issues

As the Senate received and began work on the 2011-12 biennial budget, we, in the House, turned our focus toward other pressing matters facing the Commonwealth.

By a vote of 96-0, House Bill 513 was given our seal of approval to create “Books for Brains,” an effort to promote the development of a comprehensive statewide program for encouraging preschool children to develop an appreciation for books.

Clearing the chamber 96-0, House Bill 458 would increase safety for our citizens while moving the state closer to achieving full compliance with the Adam Walsh Act. Approved by Congress in 2006, the act classifies sexual offenders into three tiers and mandates different reporting requirements for each level. It also sets forth requirements that each state must modify their sex offender registration systems in accordance with federal requirements. By approving this bill, Kentucky will move towards compliance with the act and will receive the previously appropriated \$500,000 in federal funding to aid in that endeavor.

I was particularly proud to vote in support of legislation that would allow parents of autistic children to receive more insurance coverage for intensive treatment. House Bill 159, approved by a vote of 97-0, would require insurers to cover a treatment known as “applied behavior analysis,” which has been effective in the treatment of children with autism. With early intervention identified as a key component in the treatment of autism disorders, insurers would be required to provide a majority of the coverage up to \$50,000 for treatment of children ages one through seven. Coverage would be limited to \$12,000 for the treatment of individuals ages 7 through 21 who also suffer from a milder form of autism. By passing this legislation, I believe we are giving both parents and children a chance at better treatment.

Keeping focus on health care, the House passed legislation that would provide colon cancer screening for Kentuckians who do not have health insurance by a 97-0 vote. To pay for this screening, House Bill 72 would allocate \$300,000 in the next two fiscal years and direct the Department for Public Health to develop an income-based sliding scale for individuals.

Senate Bill 62 arrived in the House as a measure that would establish Mesothelioma Awareness Day, but left as much more when an amendment was attached to include the language of House Bill 192. This amendment would direct the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to determine whether information about children who have died as a result of abuse and/or neglect should be released to the public. As amended, Senate Bill 62 easily passed by a vote of 94-0, refuting reports that amendments filed to House Bill 192 killed the provision in that legislation.

By a vote of 94-0-2, the House also favorably approved legislation that would ensure retired teachers will receive health benefits. Under House Bill 540, which has the support of all major education associations in Kentucky, retired teachers under the age of 65 would ease into a payment plan with small increases over a two-year period. Active teachers would be provided a funding mechanism for their premiums, with less than \$10 deducted from their paychecks; this amount would be matched by the district and state. Currently, only active teachers, many retired teachers older than 65 and the state pay into the system.

In committee action this week, the House Elections, Constitutional Amendments and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee approved House Bill 554. This legislation would place a constitutional amendment before the voters which, if approved, would create an independent commission to decide the salaries of legislators, judges and statewide elected

officials.

A revised version of Senate Bill 105 cleared the House Agriculture and Small Business Committee and would establish the Kentucky Livestock Care Standards Commission to set care standards for farm animals. The 13-member commission would include five commodity-group representatives appointed by the governor and one at-large appointee interested in food safety. A contentious provision included in the original measure, which would have granted this commission the ability to pass animal care regulations without any advisory oversight, was removed.

Although our time remaining in the 2010 Regular Session is short, I encourage you to stay informed of legislative action during the 2010 Regular Session. I invite you to contact me at home or through the Legislative Message Line at 800-372-7181. To find out when a committee meeting is scheduled, visit our website at www.lrc.ky.gov or call the LRC toll-free Meeting Information Line at 800-633-9650. I am also available via e-mail at ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov.

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