



2010

masw

legislative update



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Salus Populi Minima Lex Esto

The Welfare of the People Shall Be the Least Important Law

Missouri legislators did nothing this week to impose additional hardships on people whose lives are already a series of one hardship after another. That is what passes for good news in 2010.

The lack of negative legislative action is due to the General Assembly being away from the Capitol this week, on the annual legislative spring break.

Bad news continued in their absence, however, as state revenue officials tallied tax collections for February. Money coming into state coffers to pay for schools, prisons, and other vital services, continues to fall below projections. And those projections were already anticipating a terrible economy with lower-than-normal tax collections.

Legislators and the Governor will spend much of the nine weeks that remain in this year's legislative session grappling with a state budget for Fiscal Year 2011 that will fail to meet the state's obligations to its children, its elderly, its most-in-need people.

Here is a look at what legislators "accomplished" in the first nine weeks of session, prior to the current spring break.

MASW Priority: Quality Healthcare.

Nothing. (See *Fair Treatment*, below).

MASW Priority: Decent Housing.

Nothing.

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The High Price of Low Taxes

"Missouri is looking directly up at the three poorest states in America—West Virginia, Mississippi, and Arkansas—when it comes to paying people for the wide range of key services that state government provides," writes Ray Hartmann in this month's edition of St. Louis Magazine. "In terms of human investment, it's the Appalachia of the Midwest."

In this must-read article, long-time progressive media personality Hartmann documents that Missouri's budget woes are due to our chronic taxophobia, and the devastating impact on our people. [Link here to read the article.](#)

MASW Priority: Fair Treatment.

Making things worse: [HCS HB 1377](#) would subject TANF recipients to drug testing if they look or act suspiciously. In an odd attempt at “rough justice,” House members voted to include elected state officials in the drug testing requirement.

The bill has passed the House and awaits assignment to a Senate committee.

Even Worse: [SS SB 852](#) would effectively gut the Missouri Commission on Human Rights, cutting off the federal money they need to operate, and making more difficult the fight against discrimination in housing and employment.

The bill was voted “Do Pass” by the Senate Committee on General Laws, and has been debated on the Senate Floor twice. It is now on the Informal Calendar, and could be taken up at any time.

Also bad: [HB 1231](#) would require that the driver’s license written exam be given in English only, with no translation help.

It is already illegal to issue a driver’s license to someone who does not have legal permission to reside in the state, so this new restriction applies to refugees and others who are here in full compliance with the law!

The bill was heard in the House International Trade & Immigration Committee, but no further action has yet been taken.

More bad driver’s license legislation: [HJR 64](#) would allow laws requiring a photo ID for people wishing to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Once again, making life harder for those whose lives are already hard enough.

This bill was heard in the House Committee on Elections, but not yet acted upon.

Making things better: [SB 612](#) & [SB 613](#) would waive the lifetime ban on food stamp eligibility for those with a drug felony on their record; no other felony, not even rape or murder, carries such a ban.

(The subject matter of these bills falls under two MASW priorities; it is listed here under Fair Treatment, but would also fall under Quality Healthcare).

These bills were heard in the Senate Progress & Development Committee. They have not passed, but just having a hearing constitutes good news in the present political climate in Jefferson City.

More good news: [SB 783](#) is the Missouri version of the DREAM Act. It would provide that students whose parents brought them to the United States as children without proper legal paperwork, but who have attended and graduated from high school in Missouri, can attend a state college at the in-state tuition rate.

The bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee and awaits further action.

MASW Priority: Shared Prosperity.

The worst: [SS SCS SJR 29](#), the magic tax overhaul that would produce the same revenue as our current structure, but with none of the annoying complexities, none of the special exemptions and loopholes, and everyone would pay less...

Well, as it now awaits debate on the Senate floor, its sponsors are trying to make it more acceptable by adding exemptions and loopholes.

Watch www.masw.org for updates on this horrid proposal, and ways to defeat it.

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