



Legislative Update

The 2021 Iowa Legislative Session

Week of February 15th, 2021

This Week in the Iowa Legislature

With the first funnel deadline now just two weeks away, the number of subcommittee and committee meetings continues to increase exponentially. Lawmakers will spend the next two weeks ensuring their priorities pass both subcommittee and committee before the March 5th deadline. The House has passed a substantial amount of bills over to the Senate, a majority of which were passed with large bipartisan majorities, but the Senate has kept a much slower floor debate pace focusing only on the list of must do items.

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

Iowa has seen a slight improvement in its COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts over the last couple of weeks. As of Friday, nearly 12% of Iowans had received at least their first dose of the vaccine and Iowa has moved up in the state rankings for doses administered per 100,000 residents according to the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov).

Additionally, several bills intended to expand access to the COVID-19 vaccine advanced in the Iowa House of Representatives this week. The bills would improve administration of vaccines at pharmacies, allow dentists and podiatrists to administer vaccines, and ensure accurate immunization reporting to the state. It appears these bills are being fast-tracked through the process.

The Bottle Bill is Back

The debate over Iowa's bottle and plastic redemption program has surfaced yet again this session. Several bills related to the bottle redemption program advanced through the process this week and include efforts to require distributors to reveal profits made from unused bottle returns, increase distributor handling fees, and allow beverage retailers to refuse to return containers for deposit under specified circumstances. A bill of particular interest is a new proposal being led by Senator Rozenboom that would allow grocery stores to opt out of the program if a redemption center is within 20 miles, establish a Taxpayer Relief Fund for unused bottle deposits, and replace the current bottle bill program with a new system managed by the Alcoholic Beverages Division. It is yet to be determined which of these proposed solutions to the long-lasting bottle bill debate, or if any, will make it to the Governor's desk this year.

Voting Process Legislation

On Thursday both the House and the Senate advanced legislation making sweeping changes to Iowa's voting laws and processes. These proposed changes include limiting absentee ballot drop-off locations to one ballot box, shortening early and absentee voting periods, establishing misdemeanor and felony offenses for failure to adhere to election guidance, and more. The bills are partisan in nature, with Republicans in support and Democrats opposed. Republican House Speaker Pat Grassley believes that changing early voting deadlines will help shorten campaigns. While Democrat Minority Whip Jennifer Konfrst expressed concerns about the potential for voter suppression. These bills were introduced and passed out of full committees within two days and are set to be debated on the floor as early as next week.

Looking Ahead

The March 5th First Legislative Funnel deadline is now just two weeks away. We expect next week's schedule to be packed full of subcommittee and committee meetings yet again. To stay up to date on scheduled committees and subcommittees and their virtual access information, follow this [link](#).

The coming week will begin with a public hearing on the new voting process bills discussed above. The bills make changes to early and absentee voting and are being pushed simultaneously by the Republican State Government Committee Chairs in each chamber. This effort could be debated by the full House and Senate as early as the middle of the week.

Key Initiatives this Week

On Monday the AS team followed up with Representative Gobble on [HF 411](#), Passing Bikes and Bike Lights. Gobble is planning to speak to members of his caucus on the Transportation Committee to ask for this to move forward, while also removing the daytime high visibility requirements.

The AS team met with Senator Brown on Monday to discuss [SF 70](#), IBC's bill to add steering unreasonably close to a bicyclist to the enhanced penalties list. Senator Brown said he would be sure to give the bill a hearing and was open to it moving forward.

On Wednesday the Senate Transportation subcommittee of Senators Zumbach, Driscoll, and Bisignano unanimously passed [SF 70](#), IBC's bill to add steering unreasonably close to a bicyclist to the enhanced penalties list. Senator Zumbach said he was open to more conversations on deterring bicycle accidents and maybe adjusting the penalties. The bill now awaits consideration at the full Senate Transportation Committee.

On Thursday the Senate Transportation Committee passed [SSB 1155](#), Recreation on Private Lands, in an 8-5 party-line vote. The bill would include privately-owned railroad rights-of-way and crossings as public land available for private recreational use. It also includes jogging, walking and bicycling as recreational purposes and includes low-speed mopeds in the definition of bicycling. There was debate over the increased immunity this bill provides for railroad companies. The bill has been renumbered as [SF 420](#) and is eligible for Senate floor debate.

Bills of Interest

Like sessions past, Advocacy Strategies will be tracking all bills pertaining to you. Along with this document, each week you will find an excel spreadsheet attached with the bills you have registered for or which we are waiting for a declaration. **Please review this and confirm your declarations are correct and complete.** Please let us know if there are any changes that need to be made.

Housekeeping

Our ability to best represent you is based on quick and open communication. Once the legislative session progresses further, our requests for bill declarations will increase substantially. **We would ask that you let us know your organization's position on each bill within 24 hours of our notification to you so we can respond accordingly.**

Dates to Note

- March 5: First funnel deadline (Friday of the 8th week)
- April 2: Second funnel deadline (Friday of the 12th week)
- April 30: 110th calendar day of the session; legislators' per diem expires

Please feel free to contact the Advocacy Strategies Team with any questions, comments, or concerns. We are pleased to be representing your interests during the 2021 Legislative Session and throughout the year. Contact information for your lobbying team follows.

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