



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of February 11, 2013

Two big deadlines faced House members this week as they made their way through the Calendar. Thursday, February 14, was the deadline for Original Floor Action on general bills and constitutional amendments. If a bill reported out of a committee but was not addressed before this deadline, it died. Friday, February 15, was the deadline for the reconsideration and passage of general bills and constitutional amendments. Monday, February 19, will be the deadline to table any remaining motions to reconsider.

Members passed several bills focused on education reform this week. [House Bill 955](#) (HB955), commonly known as the “Third Grade Reading Gate,” passed the House floor by a vote of 95-19. This bill aims to require children to be able to read on a third grade reading level before being promoted to the fourth grade. Enactment of this measure would ensure that children in grades K-3 would receive intense reading instruction, while being tested at every level. Potential costs for the measure are unknown. An amendment passed stating the initiative will be implemented once funds are secured.

[House Bill 779](#) (HB779) lowers the age of Kindergarten aged students from six to five. Parents have a choice to enroll their children at this age. However, if they do enroll a child in Kindergarten, they must adhere to the state attendance requirements.

[House Bill 890](#) (HB890) focuses on student literacy in reading and math and on teacher performance and quality. Many different elements compose this bill: establishing a universal, statewide literacy screener for lower elementary students; creating a statewide literacy coaching program; requiring third graders to meet basic proficiency standards in reading before advancing to the fourth grade; instilling intensive reading instruction for children who fall behind in grades K-3; allowing seventh graders to advance to the eighth grade if they meet certain basic goals in reading and math; requiring high schools with graduation rates below 80 percent to submit plans on how they propose to increase graduation rates; raising the requirements for students to get in to Mississippi university schools of education by requiring them to have a 3.0 grade average and a 21 on the ACT; offering a certain number of scholarships to students who have a 3.5 GPA and a 28 ACT score to become teachers in Mississippi for at least five years; offering those same scholars incentives to teach in D & F



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districts; and creating a pilot program in four Mississippi school districts to implement the performance-based compensation program for teachers.

Other education bills passed include:

--[House Bill 138](#) (HB138) recommends assessing the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) formula yearly, rather than every four years, in order to obtain a more accurate formula based on current school year attendance.

-- [House Bill 1530](#) (HB1530) requires students to be at school 63 percent of the day in order to be counted as attending.

--[HB781](#), or the “Early Learning Act of 2013,” would require the Department of Education to implement a voluntary pre-K program on a phased-in basis beginning with the 2013-2014 school year. This bill calls for an additional two million dollars from the State. Individuals and corporations may contribute money to the program and in turn receive a tax credit. Mississippi is the last southern state that makes no investment in early childhood education.

Many bills from the House Transportation Committee passed the House floor this week, as well.

[House Bill 499](#) (HB499) eliminates the annual vehicle inspection sticker. The Department of Public Safety reports that inspection stickers cost over \$700,000 more than they bring in to operate this program. Mississippi is one of only five states still using inspection stickers.

House members also approved a bill allowing drivers with visual impairments in one eye to be able to obtain a commercial driver’s license. [House Bill 441](#) (HB441) states that in order to obtain a commercial driver’s license, drivers must have 20/40 vision in at least one eye. There are approximately 50 Mississippians with commercial driver’s licenses who have one eye.

[House Bill 481](#) (HB481) requires the automobiles of people convicted of DUIs to be equipped with an ignition interlock device that will prevent the car from being starting until the driver breathes into the device while sober. A written restriction on their driver’s license is also required.



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House members also debated several health-related bills. [House Bill 411](#) (HB411) prohibits the State Department of Health from issuing new licenses for hospices unless specifically authorized by legislation for one year with the exception of renewals. The purpose of this bill is to reduce fraud, provide more efficient hospice care and save money. The one year moratorium on new hospices would allow the State Department of Health the opportunity to work with the Legislature and the Hospice Industry to formulate a more efficient application and audit process that will ultimately result in better hospice patient care while lowering Mississippi's Medicare cap overpayment problem that currently exists. The bill passed 101-14.

[House Bill 1009](#) (HB1009) prompted prolonged debate among House members. Enactment of this measure would give the Department of Human Services (DHS) the authority to contract certain services with outside vendors. Supporters of the bill believe it will recoup a portion of taxpayer money in uncollected child support (approximately \$1 billion). Opponents of the bill maintain that the bill, as written, would allow privatization of all functions of DHS, and that privatization in a limited fashion has not worked well. Opponents also believe that costs to provide privatized services will exceed current costs to taxpayers. Furthermore, opponents believe that the proper course would be to appropriately fund the DHS budget. The bill narrowly passed by a vote of 59-57.

Toward the end of the week, the pace on the House floor increased, and a variety of bills passed.

--[HB896](#): This bill creates the Mississippi Speech-Language Therapy Scholarship for students.

--[HB1182](#): This bill provides that local governments cannot create their own food regulations.

--[HB269](#): This bill increases the death benefits for firefighters, police officers and emergency management personnel from \$65,000 to \$100,000 if killed in the line of duty.

Altogether, the House successfully completed an extensive calendar of bills which were taken up and voted on this week. At week's end, Speaker Gunn congratulated members and staff on the hard work performed by everyone.