



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of February 10, 2014

Two big deadlines faced House members this week as they made their way through the Calendar. Thursday, February 13, was the deadline for Original Floor Action on general bills and constitutional amendments. If a bill was reported out of a committee but was not addressed before this deadline, it died. Friday, February 14, was the deadline for the reconsideration and passage of general bills and constitutional amendments. Monday, February 17, will be the deadline to table any remaining motions to reconsider.

Members passed several bills related to health care reform this week. [House Bill 413](#) (HB413) establishes the Mississippi Qualified Health Center Capacity Building Grant Program and passed by a vote of 106-7. This bill aims to increase a person's access to primary care through an expansion of various services and operating hours at Mississippi's 21 federal clinics and 35 not-for-profit rural health care clinics. Approximately, \$4.8 million would be needed to implement and run this program. However, this measure is contingent on funding being available each year.

[House Bill 1289](#) (HB1289) creates the Commission on the Future of Medicaid and Health Care in Mississippi. HB1289 proposes that a group comprised of 21 members meet each month to address the changes in healthcare and technology in order to better serve Mississippians. The bill passed 72-44.

By a vote of 89-22, House members voted to pass [House Bill 1400](#) (HB1400). This bill prohibits the performance of abortions at or after the 20-week mark.

House members also passed numerous corrections reform measures. [House Bill 68](#) (HB68) requires DNA testing for violent crime **arrests**. The current language reads that people who are **convicted** of violent crimes would receive DNA testing. Proponents of this legislation hope that enactment of the measure would help prevent the incarceration of innocent people. The bill passed by a vote of 105-15.

House members voted 106-7 to pass [House Bill 585](#) (HB585), the omnibus bill that presents provisions compiled by the bipartisan, inter-branch Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force. The goal of the 21-member Task Force was to develop policies to improve public safety, reduce



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repeat offenders, restore certainty and clarity to the sentencing process, and control corrections costs. Enactment of this measure would establish several different reforms: institute true minimums for time served; eliminate the ability of The Department of Corrections to release offenders early to House Arrest, leaving the decision to the sentencing judge; clarify what constitutes a violent crime; streamline Mississippi's parole system requiring every offender to develop a case plan with the assistance of the Parole Board; and enhance and standardize victim notification regarding an offender's release. Additional reforms include changes to drug sentencing laws and property crime.

House members engaged in a lengthy debate regarding Governor Bryant's Statewide Strike Team Act, [House Bill 749](#) (HB749). If enacted, this bill would create three strike teams throughout the state comprised of local law enforcement officers. The strike teams would assist local municipalities and counties throughout the state should local law enforcement request it. Supporters believe this effort provides another avenue for cities and counties to seek additional law enforcement help should they need it. Opponents of the bill believe this encroaches on the authority of local sheriffs, the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics and the Mississippi Highway Patrol. They further oppose this bill as they feel it adds an additional layer of government that the state cannot afford. The bill passed by a vote of 69-48.

On a separate note regarding sheriffs, [House Bill 1409](#) (HB1409) passed unanimously. Enactment of this measure would provide sheriffs a pay increase. The money for the raise would come from citation fees being rerouted into the sheriff salary fund, instead of being sent to the county general fund where it has been going since 2007.

Members passed several bills focused on insurance and education reform this week, as well.

[House Bill 542](#) (HB542) requires the State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan include coverage for treatment of autism spectrum disorders. Members voted unanimously to pass it.

House members voted 79-36 to pass the [Districts of Innovation Bill](#) (HB112). Under this bill, a school board may apply for their district to be a part of this program. Being a part of a District of Innovation allows schools to have the flexibility to educate in alternative ways in hopes of boosting performance and achieving goals. The State Board of Education can approve up to five districts a year. Chosen districts shall be limited to five-year periods and must present their plans of action to the board.



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[House Bill 767 \(HB767\)](#) requires the ACT to serve as a high school exit exam in lieu of subject area tests. Ten districts will be chosen to participate in this pilot program based on meeting certain demographic requirements. The bill passed 118-1.

[House Bill 825 \(HB825\)](#) failed passage from House members by a vote of 54-65. It stated that any school district currently operating with elected superintendents would be required to have a direct referendum on the November 2014 ballot allowing residents of a county to vote on the option of appointing superintendents.

[House Bill 502 \(HB502\)](#) also brought forth lengthy debate and was ultimately recommitted to the House Education Committee for additional work. HB502 proposed to replace the New Start School Law with the Mississippi Achievement School District. This is a statewide school district that would be established to oversee the administration of certain failing schools with an "F" rating over two consecutive years. Supporters of the bill believe this new district could have assisted a number of schools in Mississippi that continually fail. Because it was recommitted, they say the New Start School Law will be re-imposed and do more damage. Opponents of this bill argue that establishing this new school district could forever take away local control over local schools.

Bills pertaining to second amendment rights passed and include:

-- [House Bill 485 \(HB485\)](#) addresses gun buy-back programs. This measure says that public entities do not need to be in the business of using municipal or public funds for the purpose of gun buy-back programs. If they participate in such activities, other funds must be used, and a federally licensed firearm dealer must be offered the sale first. Proceeds from the transaction can revert back to the general operating fund of the county. If no bids are received, they can destroy the gun.

-- [House Bill 705 \(HB705\)](#) ensures that in times of distress, a person's gun(s) may not be confiscated from them if they are in lawful possession.



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--[House Bill 314](#) (HB314) confirms that state law preempts local ordinances as it relates to possess weapons.

Members often vote to name portions of highways and intersections in memory of constituents. House members unanimously voted to pass [House Bill 1041](#) (HB1041) designating a segment of highway in Clay County as the "Representative David Gibbs Memorial Highway." Representative Gibbs passed away last session. He began serving in 1993. Members also unanimously voted to pass [House Bill 1043](#) (HB1043) designating a memorial intersection in Hinds County in honor of Rep. Deborah Dixon's late son Broderick Rashad Dixon.

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.