



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of January 12, 2015

Members did not hesitate to address big issues early on this week. After adjournment on Monday, members of the Constitution committee met and adopted [House Concurrent Resolution \(HCR\) 9](#). It was debated Tuesday morning for more than two hours on the House floor before being adopted by a vote of 65-56.

HCR9 is a legislative alternative to ballot Initiative 42. The initiative received more than the required number of signatures necessary to be placed on the ballot in November. Supporters of each measure believe their effort will focus on educating children.

Supporters of HCR9 say this legislative alternative focuses on three factors: keeping the decision about school operations and funding in the hands of the voters, not a judge for whom the voters cannot vote; preserving the integrity of the Constitution by maintaining the separation of powers between the legislature and the judiciary; and focusing on educational outputs and accomplishments, instead upon funding as the yardstick by which it is measured. They believe Initiative 42 violates those factors and removes the voice of the people.

Opponents of HCR9 believe this alternative will confuse the public. They support Initiative 42 and believe its passage will allow a court to enforce full funding of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), which was last fully funded in 2008. They argue that the people who signed a petition supporting the initiative deserve the opportunity to vote on it alone, without a competing alternative.

The Senate adopted the resolution Wednesday afternoon by a vote of 30-20. HCR9 will appear on the ballot alongside Initiative 42 on November 3. Voters will have the choice to vote for Initiative 42, for the alternative measure presented by HCR9 or against any constitutional change at all.

This week sub-committee members of the Appropriations Committee heard from numerous state agencies that came forward to submit their funding requests for Fiscal Year (FY) 16. As mentioned last week, efforts to instill performance based budgeting methods are in place as agencies make their presentations.

The Mississippi Division of Medicaid was among the agencies that prepared presentations for the committee. The group employs more than 900 people and is charged with providing access to quality health coverage to vulnerable Mississippians. The director estimated that despite increased growth into the program (possibly 800,000 beneficiaries by June 30, 2015),



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he expects cost savings due to the federal government paying for the remaining children in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) program. However, he is expecting a nearly \$100 million deficit request which will bring total state support of Medicaid close to \$1 billion. The director also outlined the top four expenditures to the Medicaid program: hospital payments, nursing facility payments, pharmacy payments and physician payments.

The Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) of Mississippi briefed members about the status of the retirement system. PERS was established by the Mississippi Legislature in 1952 to provide the state's public workforce with basic retirement coverage for life. Members pay mandatory contributions to help fund their retirement. Employers contribute about 15 percent, while nine percent is taken from members' salaries. PERS has approximately 894 employers, 162,044 members and 100,000 retirees involved in the program. The director stated that funding is continuing to improve. This year, funding is at 61 percent. PERS' funded status is expected to surpass 100 percent by 2042, which tops the goal set by the Board of Trustees of 80 percent funded by 2042.

State Economist Darrin Webb and Treasurer Lynn Fitch presented their annual economic briefing this week. Webb again confirmed that the US economy is growing gradually, with the Mississippi economy following a similar pattern. Lower gas prices are assisting in this increased momentum and encouraging stronger consumer spending. Income growth is beginning to improve and consumers and businesses are relatively upbeat. The highest job increase is in manufacturing area, with the largest decline being in the construction sector. He expects Mississippi to make both the FY15 and FY16 estimates.

The Transportation Committee met and passed [House Bill 44](#) (HB44), which designates a certain bridge on Highway 82 in Lowndes County as "Senator Terry W. Brown Memorial Bridge."

The Mississippi Commission on the Status of Women held a press conference to discuss their support of [House Bill 10](#) (HB10), which supports equal pay for women.

The deadline to request general bills and constitutional amendments came and went quickly on January 14. Monday, January 19, marks the deadline to introduce those measures. This continues to be a very busy time for Legislative Services staff members and lawmakers as they prepare the bills that will be introduced in the House this session.

Visitors to the Capitol this week included supervisors from all around the state, who were in town for their annual Mississippi Association of Supervisors meeting and reception. Throughout the Session, many different groups hold Capitol Days each week to share information on their



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organizations with members and staff. This week, Emergency Management officials and members from the ALS Association were among the groups on hand. Nurse anesthetists from around the state gathered to offer free health screenings, as well.