



Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

Week of January 19, 2015

Monday, January 19, marked the deadline for the “introduction of general bills and constitutional amendments.” To “introduce a bill,” a member submits the legislation to the Clerk’s Office, the drop box on the House floor or to the Speaker’s Office. Once bills have been introduced, they are referred to committees. Members and staff spent many hours drafting legislation and introducing bills.

This week and next week, members focus their attention on meeting the February 4 deadline to report bills out of committee. Committee members discuss the bills and decide to either pass them to the House floor or to oppose them, essentially “killing” them. If a bill does not make it out of a committee, it will not make it to the House calendar.

This week, Governor Phil Bryant delivered his fourth State of the State address during a joint session of the Legislature in the House Chamber Wednesday evening. In his speech, he outlined his priorities for the 2015 Legislative Session and covered his accomplishments over the last three years. Some of the highlights from his speech include his support for an income tax cut for working Mississippian, state contract reforms, a \$50 million investment in workforce training, and an increased focus on tourism. He praised the Legislature for their continued success in crafting a responsible budget that uses recurring money for recurring expenses.

Members of the Appropriations Committee continued to hear from numerous state agencies that presented their funding needs for Fiscal Year (FY) 16.

The Mississippi State Personnel Board (MSPB) was among the agencies that prepared presentations for the committee. The group updated committee members on facts about state employees. As of June 30, 2014, the state has 90,985 full-time employees, which is a slight decrease from the 2013 number. State teachers comprise the largest percentage (38 percent) of the agency’s employees, while the Governor’s office and Legislative Branch the smallest (less than one percent). The director stated that recruitment efforts are going well and continue in an upward trend. In 2013, approximately 19,000 job applications were received each month. That number jumped to an average of 20,000 per month in 2014. The average annual salary of



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state employees has increased from 2013's \$34,506 to \$34,655. However, sixty-one percent of state employees earn less than that. The average annual salary for Mississippi's four adjoining states is \$43,339. The director believes that the loss of younger workers and high turnover rates are directly tied to salary. The MSPB is focused on efforts to retain employees to ensure a quality workforce for Mississippi and believes salary realignment may be necessary.

The Mississippi Department of Education presented its FY16 budget request, as well. The group outlined the agency's goals and its legislative priorities, which include funding and/or support for: the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), teacher supply funds, public school building funds, the Literacy-Based Promotion Act of 2013 (Third Grade Reading Gate), expansion of early childhood education pilot programs, improvements to and increased technology systems, state special schools, College and Career Ready State Standards, test integrity, a Principal's Academy, high school innovation programs and appointed superintendents.

The Transportation Committee met this week and passed several bills regulating texting and driving. Adoption of these bills would create a civil penalty of careless driving and a \$25 fine for anyone convicted of texting or utilizing a social media site while driving.

Education bills focused on ensuring Mississippi's control of teaching standards and curriculum passed out of the Education Committee and onto the House calendar.

- [House Bill 395](#) (HB395) gives curriculum control to local school districts. Enactment of this measure would require the Mississippi Department of Education (DOE) to continue to hand down the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks to local districts that would then have the autonomy over the development of curriculum. It passed by a vote of 92-25.
- [House Bill 156](#) (HB156) uncouples Mississippi from the federal government regarding education standards. The language in the bill changes the name of the current standards from Common Core Standards to Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards, which the state board currently uses. Adoption of this measure would give the state ownership of the standards and control to change or amend them as deemed necessary. HB156 passed by a vote of 95-21.

Judiciary B committee members heard from Dr. Hannah Gay, the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) physician credited with the functional curing of an HIV-infected child,



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who spoke and answered questions at length on the subject of requiring DNA testing for violent crime arrests.

On the House floor, the Insurance Committee presented [House Bill 346](#) (HB346). HB346 allows exclusions and limitations on liability insurance required under the Mississippi Motor Vehicle Safety-Responsibility Law. Supporters believe this bill provides an op-out choice for policy holders to remove someone from their policy, should they choose, or keep everyone in their household on the policy. Supporters believe this law removes the threat of risk being assumed by the entire household. Under current law, policies cover every licensed driver living in the household. Opponents of the bill argue that the bill serves no purpose. They believe Mississippi already has the highest rates of uninsured motorists, and passage of this measure will add to that number. The bill passed by a vote of 70-50.

House and Senate members from the MS Gulf Coast and members from both Insurance committees attended a press conference this week to discuss the effects of high property insurance rates on the MS Gulf Coast and the state economies. Some legislators support the passage of a bill that would require insurance companies to disclose how much they are charging to insure property in specific geographic areas.

Philadelphia native and Country Music Legend Marty Stuart visited with lawmakers at the MS State Capitol today. Stuart is in town to promote the future Marty Stuart Center and Congress of Country Music Hall in Philadelphia, which, as he phrased it, will be the “Smithsonian of Country Music Memorabilia.”

Visitors to the Capitol this week included Mississippi Firefighters/Fire Chief’s Association, Mississippi Nurses Association, Mississippi Affordable Wind Insurance Coalition, Mississippi Public Broadcasting and Mississippi Parents for Vaccine Rights.