



## Mississippi House of Representatives Weekly Summary

**Week of March 28, 2016**

House members faced another major deadline this week as they continued to address Senate bills on the House floor. Requests for bills to be read continued this week. By Wednesday, House members needed to address all general, nonrevenue bills received from the Senate. If a Senate bill was not taken up and passed by Wednesday, it died on the Calendar. Thursday was the last day for reconsidering Senate bills, and Friday was the deadline for tabling Motions to Reconsider.

On the House floor, members debated a variety of bills.

[Senate Bill 2364](#) creates the Juvenile Detention Facilities Licensing Act, which would create licensing for juvenile detention centers and provide definitions, duties and responsibilities. The intent of this bill is to create uniformity within the system. The Mississippi Department of Education is tasked with promulgating certain rules for educating juveniles during their stay, which is typically 3-20 days. The bill passed by a vote of 118-1.

[Senate Bill 2238](#) prohibits the Division of Medicaid from reimbursing the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) for abortion services. Supporters of this legislation believe the taxpayers of Mississippi should have a voice in how taxpayer dollars are spent. Opponents argue that because a total of \$544 has been paid to PPFA from the Division of Medicaid over the last five years, this legislation will result in lawsuits costlier than that amount. They also contend that PPFA provides educational services to the public on birth control, fertility awareness and information on pregnancy. The bill passed by a vote of 77-37.

[Senate Bill 2070](#) attempts to increase the rate of breastfeeding in Mississippi by requiring hospitals to adopt pro-breastfeeding policies and to educate all employees who interact with mother and child on this method. The bill would also require the Department of Health to develop a policy and video detailing the benefits of breastfeeding. An amendment was added to reenact the Mississippi Small Business and Grocer Investment Act, which would encourage food retailers to locate to underserved areas. The bill passed by a vote of 104-15.

[Senate Bill 2493](#) establishes the Supporting and Strengthening Families Act. This legislation is designed to give families facing crises the ability to execute a power of attorney for voluntary guardianship for their children for a year. This does not impact parental rights. It provides parents a tool to be proactive before the Department of Human Services or the court systems become involved. Children would be placed with a family member or third party. The agency involved would require a full criminal background check on any third party. Children would be reunited with the parent once the parent's issue is resolved. The bill passed by a vote of 118-0.



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[Senate Bill 2418](#) provides that domestic abuse would be additional grounds for divorce. Currently in Mississippi, there are 12 grounds for divorce. The bill passed by a vote of 115-1.

[Senate Bill 2603](#) permits municipalities with a population of 500 or less to choose to elect three aldermen instead of five. Enactment of this measure would affect 77 small municipalities. The reasoning behind this legislation is that many of these small areas have difficulty finding qualified people to run. This is not a mandate but a choice for the applicable municipalities. The bill passed by a vote 117-2.

Amendments to add a state lottery were added to two bills this week.

--[Senate Bill 2541](#) develops a study committee to learn more about Fantasy Contests. This committee would be tasked with addressing the guidelines for those activities that should be regulated. The gaming commission would then examine the report and return to the legislature with a recommendation. The bill passed by a vote of 83-37.

--[Senate Bill 2524](#) revises the compensation for bingo supervisors and alternate supervisors in the Charitable Bingo Law. The bill passed by a vote of 79-41.

The House addressed and passed all 55 Senate Appropriations bills on Thursday in advance of the April 5 deadline. At the beginning of the Session, the chairmen from both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees meet to divide the Appropriation and Revenue bills. Once each chamber votes on the measures, they go to the other chamber for approval. All bills must pass both chambers in identical form before they can be signed into law by the Governor.

House Appropriations Chairman Frierson presented a detailed explanation of [Senate Bill 2924](#), the "Deficit Bill." The House plan offers \$5.4 million more than the Senate plan. The House proposal intends to allocate funds from the Working Cash Stabilization Reserve Fund or the Rainy Day Fund (RDF) for agency deficits. The RDF is considered full at approximately \$400 million. If the House plan passes, \$286 million would remain. Under the Senate plan, approximately \$350 million would remain. Chairman Frierson recommended to the committee sending the bill to conference. Once SB2924 gets to conference, he will suggest to the Senate that if we adopt their plan, we amend the "Transfer bill" to permit the Governor authority to pull from more from the RDF until June 30, 2016. Current law allows the Governor to transfer up to \$50 million from the RDF. Some agency deficit amounts include: \$51 million for the Division of Medicaid; \$5 million for the Department of Health; \$4 million for the Institutes of Higher Learning.

Many of the bills debated toward the end of the week were before the House for concurrence or non-concurrence. If the House voted to concur or agree with Senate amendments, the bill was sent directly to Governor Bryant to sign into law. However if the decision was not to concur but to invite conference, the bill is sent to a conference committee of three members each from the House and Senate.



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Some of the bills to which the House concurred with Senate changes include:

--House members voted to concur with the Senate on [House Bill 1523](#), the “Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act,” by a vote of 69-44. Supporters of this bill believe legal protections should be in place for businesses and public employees who believe that marriage occurs between a man and a woman. Enactment of this measure would provide protection against discrimination for those who hold those beliefs. Opponents argue the bill is discriminatory. They also contend that public employees should adhere to the Supreme Court’s ruling on marriage.

--[House Bill 899](#) revises certain provisions regarding the administration of the Public Employees’ Retirement System.

--[House Bill 809](#) authorizes online voter registration under the authority of the Secretary of State.

For those bills going to conference, the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor each assign conferees from their respective Chambers who will work together to reach an agreement on the language of the bills. Once the conference committee members agree on the language, the bills are taken back to each chamber and voted to either pass or recommit the report for further conference.

A few of the bills House members sent to conference this week include:

--[House Bill 289](#) authorizes the State Board of Health to charge fees for services based on the cost of providing the services.

--[House Bill 797](#) revises the election code.

--[House Bill 1498](#) extends the period of one year that the Department of Corrections is exempt from the State Personnel Board.