



Week of February 4, 2019

The fifth week of the 2019 legislative session proved to be the busiest thus far. Committee meetings to discuss House bills wrapped up early in the week because of Tuesday's general bills deadline. The House convened Wednesday through Friday to discuss the legislation that made it to the calendar. The bills that were considered dealt with a variety of topics.

[House Bill 816](#), or the Mississippi Educational Talent Recruitment Act, would work to prevent "brain drain" in the state caused by recent college graduates leaving the state in pursuit of more lucrative employment opportunities. If enacted into law, it would provide income tax incentives in the form of a rebate amounting to 50 percent of the person's state income tax liability for recent graduates of colleges and other post-graduate degree programs if they stay in Mississippi for at least five years and invest in the state. This also includes natives from other states who move to Mississippi upon graduation and meet conditions of the program. Proponents of the bill said tax incentives would give talented individuals a reason to stay in the state and that five years is enough time to "put down roots." Opponents argued that while the bill was headed in the right direction, tax incentives are not enough to keep talented people in the state. The bill passed the House with a bipartisan vote of 111-2.

Another greatly debated bill was [House Bill 623](#), which amends current law to exempt school districts with an "A" or "B" accountability rating from performing certain duties imposed on other school districts around the state. Some of these duties include reporting student grades to the Department of Education, participating in the Department of Education's textbook selection process, completing surveys and some continuing education requirements for teachers. Through an established grant program, "A" and "B" schools would also be allowed to offer certain incentives for eligible teachers, such as loan forgiveness and housing assistance. Proponents of the bill said that these incentives would help make the school environment more about learning and less burdened with bureaucratic oversight. Opponents of the bill claimed that this would further disadvantage students in "C," "D" and "F" school districts which do not have the opportunity to attend a better rated school. Opponents also argued that the teacher incentives would make it harder for lower rated schools to recruit good teachers. The bill passed the House 85-28.

[House Bill 1283](#), or the Mississippi School Safety Act of 2019, would require all school districts to conduct active shooter drills in the first 60 days of each semester or term. The bill includes recommendations made by the School Safety Task Force which Governor Phil Bryant created in June 2018. This was in response to several mass shootings around the United States. Debate ensued when opponents of the bill wanted to make student participation in these drills optional. Another topic of concern was that the drills would teach a student how to successfully carry out a mass shooting.

Proponents of the bill debated that the active shooter drills would benefit the majority of students. The bill passed with a bipartisan vote of 115-3.

[House Bill 677](#) allows bystanders to report a vehicle overtaking a school bus that is stopped. The bill would also allow a bus driver to prevent being overtaken by blocking the two outermost lanes of traffic. The origin of the bill stems from several children in Mississippi and around the United States who have been hit and killed by someone failing to yield for a stopped school bus in the last year. The bill passed the House with a bipartisan vote of 113-4.

Two bills from the Public Utilities Committee would help prevent spam phone calls to Mississippians. [House Bill 763](#) provides that call spoofing is a violation of the Mississippi Telephone Solicitation Act and passed 110-6. [House Bill 1045](#) increases the maximum civil penalties for violations of the Mississippi Telephone Solicitation Act and passed 115-3.

A number of noncontroversial bills also passed through the House this week, including a bill creating the “Mississippi Joint Municipal Law Enforcement Act” ([HB 260](#)), a bill prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in public schools on students with disabilities ([HB 1182](#)), a bill to allow athletic team physicians of nonresident sports teams to provide treatment to players at sporting events in Mississippi ([HB 977](#)) and a bill authorizing Mental Health Courts to be created throughout the state ([HB 334](#)).

Floor debate will continue on these general bills until the Feb. 14 deadline. Visitors this week included Jackson State University students and alumni, ladies from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the Mississippi Economic Development Council and 4-H students from around the state.