



Week of March 26, 2018

Legislators completed the last day of the 2018 legislative session on Wednesday, March 28, after working through the weekend to finalize the state budget.

While many significant pieces of legislation did not make it through the process this year, several did and are now being signed into law by the Governor.

One of the most notable pieces of legislation this session was a law to prohibit abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy. This will be the most restrictive abortion law in the country.

The legislature spent a good bit of time discussing Medicaid this year. While the federal government provides certain services, the state must decide what additional services it will provide. This year, members adopted legislation that mandates that managed care companies pay the same reimbursement rate as the legislature-set rates for Medicaid. The new law deletes the annual limit on physician visits, home health service visits and the monthly prescription limit. It will also provide reimbursement for treatment for those experiencing opioid dependency, provide payment options for rural hospitals and reimbursements for OB/GYNs and psychiatrists.

Pharmacists will now be able to provide additional information to patients about affordable options for medication with the Prescription Drugs Consumer Affordable Alternative Payment Options Act.

Bonds for this year total \$250 million and will go toward the Local System Bridge Repair and Rehabilitation Program (LSBP), universities and community colleges, Ingalls, the Department of Finance and Administration and a loan program to assist small cities and counties with water and sewer projects.

The failure to have mandatory motor vehicle liability insurance will now be a criminal offense instead of a civil violation.

Transport of unopened beer and light wine on state and federal highways in dry areas of the state will now be allowed. Municipalities that have voted to permit the sale and consumption of alcohol will also be able to establish leisure and recreation districts, which will allow consumers to walk from place to place with alcohol within a designated area.

The Kaelin Kersh Act will require that any operator of an emergency vehicle must use the vehicle's blinking or rotating lights when traveling at a speed faster than 30 miles per hour over the speed limit.

Legislation to address the concerns of veterans will remove the prohibition that county veteran service officers may not hold additional elected or appointed positions, and allow the executive or deputy director of the State Veterans Affairs Board to be an active member of the Armed Forces.

The legislature also expanded reemployment protections for military servicemen and veterans with a law that will ensure that a service member or veteran be restored to his or her previous position after returning from training with the Armed Forces in another state.

An act was created to provide certain immunities for a person who requests assistance during a medical emergency caused by the consumption of alcohol.

The issue of dog fighting was addressed and penalties increased for any person that owns, possesses, buys, sells, transfers, or manufactures paraphernalia for the purpose of dog fighting. The bill sets the maximum penalty for dog fighting at a fine of \$10,000 or 10 years in the State Penitentiary.

While still challenging, crafting the state budget was not as difficult this year after a boost in the economy provided lawmakers with an extra \$56 million. This year the approximately \$6 billion budget provided small increases for education, Child Protective Services, the Department of Public Health and the Department of Public Safety. In finalizing the budget legislators also set aside two percent of the general fund for the state's rainy day fund.

Proposed legislation that did not make it through the process included a new education funding formula, an all-encompassing road and bridge improvement plan and a state lottery.