



Week of January 30, 2023

The fifth week of the 2022 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. Members convened in the House Chamber for longer periods to discuss the legislation that made it to the calendar. More than 100 bills were discussed, and they included a wide variety of topics.

The most debated bill this week was [House Bill 1168](#). The bill would alter the allocations of the one percent sales tax in Jackson so that funds go directly to repairing the water system. Currently, this revenue goes to water, sewer, roads and bridges. The tax generates approximately \$15 million annually. Proponents of the bill said that the water system is in dire need of repair and this influx of cash would help. The opposition argued that \$600 million is already coming from the federal government's infrastructure plan, and the roads and bridges in Jackson will suffer from the lack of funding. After more than an hour of debate and two failed amendments, HB 1168 passed 76-41 before being held on a motion to reconsider.

Several education bills were passed this week. [House Bill 1365](#) would ensure that assistant teachers receive their pay raises from last year, as well as a new salary minimum of \$20,000. [House Bill 1369](#) would adjust the funding formula of MAEP from being based on average student attendance to student enrollment. [House Bill 1373](#), or the "Released-Time Moral Instruction Act of 2023," would allow school boards to permit students who wish to participate in religious activities during the school day be excused with parental consent. These activities would not take place on school premises, but it would allow parents to take a child to a religious activity one hour a week without repercussions.

[House Bill 989](#) would remove Child Protection Services from the Department of Human Services and make it a separate agency. CPS was established by the legislature in 2016 and was made a subagency of MDHS. The bill passed by a vote of 102-9 and has been sent to the Senate.

[House Bill 1167](#) would revise the residential builder and remodeler license examination requirements for certain applicants. Currently, builders must pass an exam to obtain a license. This would provide an alternative pathway by removing the exam requirement if the applicant has been working for over five years and has three letters of recommendation. The bill passed by a unanimous vote of 110-0.

One bill that failed this week was [House Bill 1375](#). The bill would require that an annexed area of a municipality receive services within three years of the annexation decree. If the services are not met after three years, the annexation would be deemed null and void. The bill required a three-fifths majority to pass and only received a vote of 62-45. It is now being held on a motion to reconsider.

[House Bill 1392](#) would require the Department of Human Services to establish and maintain the Mississippi Vulnerable Persons Abuse Registry. The bill passed as amended by a vote of 113-0.

[House Bill 384](#) would allow local authorities to permit package retail sales on Sundays from 1-6 p.m. This would only apply to wet counties and municipalities under the Local Option Beverage Control Law. HB 384 passed with a vote of 72-39 and has been sent to the Senate for consideration.

The Retailer Tax Fairness Act, or [House Bill 735](#), would give store owners a tax break by not collecting state and local taxes on the 2.5% interchange fee owed to banks and credit card companies when a customer uses a credit card. The bill passed by a vote of 109-2, and it has been sent to the Senate for consideration.

[House Bill 1318](#) would revise provisions related to baby drop-off and safe haven laws. The maximum age of the infant would be changed to 90 days, and municipalities and counties would be able to sponsor a baby safety device, or “baby box,” for anonymous drop-off. The bill passed unanimously by a vote of 111-0 before being held on a motion to reconsider.

[House Bill 1315](#) would regulate pornographic media exposure to minors by requiring commercial entities to conduct age verification of the consumer. The bill is similar to one passed in the Louisiana Legislature earlier this year. HB 1315 passed with a vote of 111-2.

[House Bill 1371](#) would make it a felony for therapists to have sexual contact with current patients or former patients after up to twelve months of receiving services. The bill caused some debate with opponents arguing that some of the relationships could be consensual. Proponents of the bill countered that this bill was trying to prevent abuse of power by a person rendering services. The bill passed by a vote of 62-47 before being held on a motion to reconsider.

Several bills were passed unanimously with little debate: the Department of Revenue would be authorized to issue electronic titles and liens for motor vehicles and manufactured homes ([House Bill 1170](#)); state agencies would have to give preference to Mississippi-made drones, and drones made in China would be prohibited ([House Bill 1293](#)); Mississippi would enter into an occupational therapy license compact with several other states for license reciprocity in member states ([House Bill 478](#)); and veterans will now be included in provisions under occupational licensing when relating to military members ([House Bill 1039](#)).

Floor debate will continue on general bills until the Feb. 9 deadline. After that, discussion will move to appropriations and revenue bills, as well as bills originating in the Senate.

On Tuesday, Representative Alyce Clarke (D – Jackson) asked for a point of personal privilege to speak to the House. From the well, she announced that after almost 38 years of service, she will not be seeking re-election this November. Representative Clarke, who was first elected in March 1985, was the first African American woman to serve in the Mississippi Legislature.