

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Lawmakers Wrap Up Short Spring Session

When House and Senate Democratic leadership released their proposed spring 2022 legislative calendar with an adjournment date of April 8, 2022, many Statehouse regulars were skeptical. It would be the earliest adjournment date in the past thirty years. Even with a front-loaded legislative schedule, human nature combined with Illinois' legislative culture made it seem an impossible feat.

Senate President Don Harmon and House Speaker Chris Welch proved the skeptics wrong. Both chambers completed their business in the early morning hours of April 9 and lawmakers can now shift their focus from legislative matters to the general primary election that will be held on June 28, 2022. The delayed primary was the driving force behind the early adjournment, necessitated by delays to the U.S. Census and in turn the decennial redistricting process resulting from COVID-19. The shortened session meant that fewer bills were considered, but several measures impacting fire protection districts saw legislative action this spring.

IAFPD was successful in passing legislation that will assist fire protection districts in obtaining reimbursement for legal costs incurred when collecting annexation payments from municipalities. House Bill 4461 will require municipalities to reimburse fire protection districts for all costs incurred by the fire protection district in collecting the amount due to the district from annexations, including reasonable legal fees and court costs. House Bill

4461, sponsored by Representative Larry Walsh (D-Joliet) and Senator John Connor (D-Crest Hill) passed both chambers unanimously and if approved by the Governor will take effect on January 1, 2023.

Another initiative of IAFPD, House Bill 5171, was approved unanimously by the Illinois House but stalled in the Senate. House Bill 5171, sponsored by Rep. Steven Reick (R-Woodstock) would provide for guaranteed representation for fire protection districts on the Illinois Firefighters' Pension Investment Fund Board. IAFPD has advocated for a dedicated spot on the IFPIF Board since the downstate firefighter pensions funds were consolidated in late 2019. The language of House Bill 5171 provides that if an election for the three employer seats results in no one from a fire protection district being elected, the fire protection district candidate receiving the largest number of votes will be seated. While the bill had strong support in the House, it was held in the Senate due to a sponsorship issue. IAFPD will be reaching out to the Senate sponsor, Senator Cristina Castro (D-Elgin) this spring and hopes to secure passage of House Bill 5171 during the fall veto session.

Legislation that would have provided a \$500 tax credit for volunteer firefighters passed the Senate but ran into roadblock in the Illinois House. Senate Bill 3027, sponsored by Senator Christopher Belt (D-Belleville) would have provided a tax credit to volunteers earning up to \$10,000 annually as a volunteer firefighter.

While there was strong support among lawmakers for volunteer firefighters and SB 3027 had 52 co-sponsors, the Illinois Department of Revenue and the Office of the State Fire Marshal voiced concerns regarding how the tax break program would be implemented. The fire service lobby will continue to brainstorm solutions to implementing a tax credit for volunteers over the summer.

The final days of the spring session produced additional bills that could impact fire protection districts and their employees and volunteers. House Bill 1571 creates the Off-Hours Child Care Act. Under the newly-created act, the Illinois Department of Human Services will administer an Off-Hours Child Care Program to help first responders and other workers identify and access off-hours, night, or sleep time childcare. The bill defines "first responders" as emergency medical services personnel, firefighters, and law enforcement officers. The Department is required to implement the Off-Hours Child Care Program by July 1, 2022.

Another bill which passed on the final day of session will authorize the Illinois State Comptroller to Comptroller to develop an interactive map on the IOC's website providing information on the location and annual financial information of taxing bodies. House Bill 568 allows the Comptroller to launch the informational tool beginning January 1, 2023. ■