

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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A Session Like No Other

At this writing, just six weeks remain in the spring 2021 legislative session. It has been a session like no other due to Covid-19. Committees are meeting via Zoom in the House and with Zoom as well as in-person in the Senate. Interest groups and the lobbyists that represent them have struggled with limited access to lawmakers and staff. A significant number of session days have been cancelled in both chambers. The House has reinstated the use of a Consent Calendar, consolidating voting on non-controversial bills to save time in a legislative session where that commodity is at a premium.

Additionally, three of the four legislative caucuses have elected new leadership in the past 18 months with the elections of Senate President Don Harmon, Senate Republican Leader Dan McConchie and House Speaker Emanuel Chris Welch. New leadership comes with changes in staff along with the new standing committees in both chambers and changes in committee leadership.

IAFPD came to this unusual legislative session with an ambitious agenda. We reintroduced legislation to provide fire protection districts with a role in the governance of the new Illinois Firefighters' Pension Investment Fund, filed as House Bill 3746. The bill was not heard in the House Personnel and Pensions Committee by the committee deadline, but IAFPD is working with our sponsor to convene stakeholder groups to discuss the legislation. Our hope is to advance

the bill through an amendment to a shell or vehicle bill pending those discussions.

We also filed legislation that will ensure that a response time study is conducted before any involuntary consolidation of a fire protection district or closure of a fire station. Local government consolidation has been a hot topic in the General Assembly for the past few years. While IAFPD supports thoughtful consolidation to save costs to taxpayers, we want to prevent consolidation that is not vetted through referendum and ensure that residents and property owners are not negatively impacted. House Bill 3763 has been approved unanimously by the House Police & Fire Committee and has been included in the House Consent Calendar.

A proposal to allow fire protection districts that have not received payments owed by a municipality for an annexation as provided under the Fire Protection District Act has been filed as Senate Bill 1410. The need for this bill was brought to the Association by the Marseilles Fire Protection District, but the problem has been experienced by districts throughout the state. SB 1410 will likely need an amendment to align with similar offset programs administered by the Illinois Comptroller's Office.

Legislation to allow volunteer, part-time, and paid-on-call firefighters and EMTs to receive workers' compensation benefits the day after an accident or injury was introduced as Senate Bill 301. The bill has not been heard in the

Senate Judiciary Committee prior to the committee deadline, but IAFPD will explore alternate paths to passage in the final weeks of session.

Member engagement is even more important under the "new normal" of the Illinois General Assembly. Limited face-to-face access to legislators and the Capitol Building have made representing IAFPD a greater challenge in 2021. In spite of these limitations, we have bills that are advancing that will provide real benefits to you and the fire protection districts you serve. Please continue to respond to calls for action and keep the lines of communication open with your representatives and senators in support of the IAFPD legislative agenda. ■

Special Announcement:

The 2021 Edition of the IAFPD's most popular resource will be available for purchase at the Annual Conference in June!

The Handbook for Trustees is an indexed and understandable explanation of the laws which govern fire protection districts in Illinois with corresponding statutes to the duties and responsibilities of the fire district administration.

