

Illinois Legislative News

Legislator wants vote-by-mail expansion

When Illinois’ primary loomed, many people worried there would be low voter with the coronavirus pandemic in the background, which turned out to be the case in some counties.

“Illinoisans had to choose between keeping themselves healthy or casting their vote,” state Sen. Julie Morrison, D-Lake Forest, said.

Morrison plans to file a measure to further expand Illinois’ vote-by-mail program. Illinoisans would have the option to forego traditional polling places and cast their ballot from home. Under the proposal, each registered voter would be mailed a ballot, which would then be returned to the county elections office and counted on Election Day.

The change would not preclude in-person voting opportunities on and/or before Election Day.

Morrison’s vote-by-mail measure will be based on similar protocols in Oregon, Colorado and Washington state.

Washington — which is home of one of the largest coronavirus outbreaks in the country — held its primary a week before Illinois. Yet, because all its voting is done by mail, people were able to cast their ballot without putting their health and safety in jeopardy, she said.

Bristow backs FOID Processing measure

State Rep. Monica Bristow, D-Alton, is sponsoring legislation to ensure that funds allocated for the processing of Firearm Owners Identification cards are safeguarded to prevent the backlog of applications and speed up the application process.

“The FOID process already places an unnecessary burden on responsible gun owners, so the diversion of funds for the application process is only hurting those that are trying to follow the law,” said Bristow. “My office is constantly getting calls about the delay on FOID card processing, and it’s clear that we need a safeguard on these resources to meet the needs of residents.”

Bristow is a sponsor for House Bill 4754, which would prohibit the use of funds set aside for Firearm Services Fund, the Mental Health Reporting Fund, and the Firearm Dealer License Certification Fund to be swept for other purposes. The diverting of funds has resulted in a major backlog of FOID cards, where 62,000 applications are in need of review. Bristow’s legislation will prevent fund sweeps for any use not specified by law and help stop future backlogs from occurring again.

“These funds are intended to be set aside for certain services provided by the Illinois State Police, and this legislation will ensure they will be used properly and as they were intended,” said Bristow. “This legislation that I am proposing will help secure the Second Amendment rights of citizens who are simply trying to abide by the law as responsible gun owners.”

Manar backs journalism task force legislation

The state would launch a new effort aimed at reversing the decline of local journalism in small and mid-sized towns in Illinois under legislation co-sponsored by State Senator Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill.

Authored by state Sen. Steve Stadelman,

D-Rockford, a former newsman, Senate Bill 3457 creates the Local Journalism Task Force, which would conduct a study on communities underserved by local journalism and provide insight on how to preserve and restore news coverage in those areas. The task force would be made up of 12 individuals representing print and broadcast media, journalism schools, and state and local government leaders.

“Quality local news is an important element of any thriving community,” Manar said. “For generations, local newspapers have document the highs and lows of communities like mine, served as a watchful eye over local leaders, and amplified stories of rural families that would otherwise go unheard. It’s important that we recognize the value they bring and ensure their work continues.”

The study would review all aspects of local journalism, including, but not limited to the adequacy of press coverage of communities, the ratio of residents to media outlets, the impact of social media on local news, and strategies to improve local news access.

The task force would also be required to present public policy solutions to improve the sustainability of local press business models. The task force must submit the findings from the study to the governor and the General Assembly no later than one year after the law takes effect.

Sam Fisher, the president and CEO of the Illinois Press Association, says newspapers large and small, throughout Illinois, face challenges brought on by the internet and the erosion of local businesses.

A study by the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Media at the University of North Carolina showed Illinois has lost 157 weekly newspapers since 2004, while the United States has lost more than 1,700 altogether.

If passed, the task force would be required to submit the findings from its study to the governor’s office, as well as the General Assembly, no later than January 1, 2022.

Bills aim to rein in pharmacy benefits

Following the launch of a statewide drug affordability campaign, state Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill, unveiled a sweeping package of legislation aimed at putting checks on the pricing power of pharmacy benefit managers — known as PBMs — and lowering the cost of prescription drugs for Illinoisans.

According to an analysis by CBS News, in the first half of 2019 alone, prices increased for over 3,400 prescription drugs. The average price hike is 10.5 percent or five times the rate of inflation.

“Data shows the pharmaceutical industry has sky-high profit margins while the cost of vital medications continues to climb at four and five times the rate of inflation. The numbers illustrate a legalized price-gouging racket fortified by political influence,” Manar said. “The current system is the result of drug monopolies and PBMs having unrestrained power to set and manipulate prices, and the failure of lawmakers to stand up for the rest of us.”

Manar’s package of legislation includes:

- SB 3740 - Prohibits spread-pricing, which is when PBMs pocket a portion of the amount paid to them by the health insurer for a prescription drug instead of passing the full amounts on to pharmacies who are dispensing the drug.
- SB 3117 - Gives a PBM a legal obligation to manage health plans for



a third party in a way that reflects the best interest of the third party and its beneficiaries. SB 3117 also allows the Department of Insurance to impose fines and revoke a PBM’s license for violating that duty.

- SB 3734 - Prohibits a PBM from reimbursing a pharmacist or pharmacy for a drug in an amount less than the PBM reimburses itself or an affiliate for the same drug.
- SB 3060 - Requires pharmacies to post a notice informing consumers that they may request current pharmacy retail prices at the point of sale. Also requires pharmacies to provide customers directly with the retail price (before insurance) of a prescription drug, in writing and electronically prior to purchase.
- SB 3741 - Prohibits a PBM from requiring a prescription to be filled by a mail order pharmacy as a condition for reimbursing the cost of the drug.
- SB 3543 - Requires all Medicaid managed care organizations to reimburse pharmacy provider dispensing fees and acquisition costs at no less than the amounts established under the fee-for-service program.

Supporters urge credit for first responders

To incentivize future recruitment and offset their out-of-pocket costs, volunteer firefighters and emergency medical service providers in Illinois would receive a \$500 annual tax credit under legislation co-sponsored by state Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill.

“Rural communities like mine rely on volunteer first responders, who often receive little to no compensation for their selfless work, while spending their own money on travel, training, and supplies,” Manar said. “My hope is that this will provide them some overdue relief and help address the EMT shortage facing Central Illinois.”

Senate Bill 3224 provides a \$500 tax credit to those who serve as volunteer firefighters and EMS providers. It is intended to help reduce the financial burden – such as paying for medical and fire equipment, training, and licensure – for volunteer first responders, while helping local departments recruit new volunteers.

Currently, roughly 70 percent of the fire departments in Illinois are volunteer based, and many rural communities in Central Illinois use volunteer EMS providers.

The legislation was introduced by state Sens. Jason Barickman, R-Bloomington, and Ram Villavalam, D-Chicago, and

has been assigned to the Revenue Subcommittee on Tax Exemptions and Credits.

Bill would create board on drug affordability

More than half of Illinois residents are burdened by the high cost of health care and prescription drugs, according to a new Consumer Healthcare Experience State Survey (CHESS), commissioned in January 2020 by Protect Our Care Illinois and Altarum’s Healthcare Value Hub, with the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The survey found that 54 percent of respondents are either “worried” or “very worried” about affording the cost of prescription drugs, and 28 percent of Illinois adults have rationed or gone without medication due to the skyrocketing cost of prescription medication.

“These findings signal the degree to which the prescription drug industry is failing to serve the health of patients, while those responsible face zero consequence,” said state Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill. “It puts the onus on every legislator to be a part of a solution that delivers serious transparency and accountability to an industry besieged by profiteering and exploitation of working families.”

Will Guzzardi (D-Chicago), and advocates from the Protect Our Care Illinois coalition. Guzzardi and Manar also announced new legislation, House Bill 3493, to establish the Prescription Drug Affordability Board, which would review data on drug prices and set new payment limits for state-regulated plans.

“This new consumer health survey confirms what we have known for a while: people in Illinois are being crushed by the cost of health care and prescription drugs, and they are looking to state government to address this huge issue. We have to do something now to provide relief to Illinois families,” said Rep. Guzzardi, who chairs the House Prescription Drug Affordability and Accessibility Committee. “When it comes to tackling drug costs, 86 percent of survey respondents endorsed the creation of Prescription Drug Affordability Board to examine the evidence and establish acceptable costs for drugs – and I’m committed to bringing that type of oversight to Illinois.”

The findings revealed that both liberal and conservative Illinoisans showed high support for legislative solutions to address price gouging and bring heightened transparency to the prescription drug industry.