

State Legislative Update

Monday, April 20, 2009

Introduction:

The Ohio legislature returns this week from a two-week spring vacation. There are a number of important bills affecting higher education that have been introduced including, of course, the state's biennium budget. Therefore, the UT Office of Government Relations will send out an update every Monday concerning the status of these selective bills. Please distribute as widely as you see fit. Also, feel free to call or send e-mails to our office with comments and questions. Full versions of bills may be found at this Ohio government Web site: http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/search.cfm#bill_number . Please note that bills are not always posted in a timely fashion, may not be the current version, and may not include added amendments.

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HB 1 This is the biennium budget that runs from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011. This bill is having its third hearing in the House Finance Committee. Higher education including a UT student has already testified at the Finance Committee's Higher Education sub-committee a couple of weeks ago. There may be additional testimony by higher education officials this Wednesday. The thinking at this writing is that higher education has support and should not testify further.

Construction Reform Amendment It is planned that a construction reform amendment updating state rules for construction practices will be attached to HB 1. If passed, UT may save millions of dollars in future construction costs.

(NOTE: The Senate Finance Committee is also starting to have hearings on the budget. However, the Senate can't move forward on the bill until the full House passes the substitute budget bill with all its amendments and then sends it on the Senate. Of course, after the Senate passes its version, it will then go to conference committee. The last budget did not go to conference because the governor's budget was very popular and the Republicans controlled both the House and Senate, which they do not do now.)

SB 83 "Retirement Benefits" This bill is having its second proponent hearing in the Senate Health, Human Services, and Aging Committee. A proponent hearing means that only persons in favor of the bill will testify and face questions. This bill has the potential of seriously altering OPERS benefits to retirees. (NOTE: This bill does not apply to STRS.) We are tracking this bill carefully. At this point in time, it is not expected to come up for a vote this session. We are also awaiting an analysis from OPERS.

SB 69 “Student Vaccinations” Also in the Senate Health, Human Services, and Aging Committee, this is a bill requiring that students living on-campus be vaccinated for meningococcal meningitis and hepatitis B. This bill will have its 4th hearing (all sides testimony) and will probably pass out of committee to the full Senate.

HB 123 “Graduate Tax Credit” This bill in the House Ways and Means Committee proposes to grant an income tax credit to individuals who earn degrees in the STEM (not including medicine) disciplines to earn tax credits. This bill will have its first hearing and is not expected to progress this year. HOWEVER, **SB 5** “Grants for Graduates” is similar and is advancing through the Senate Finance Committee and ultimately has a better chance of passage. This bill “provides a limited number of grants for the purchase of qualifying first homes to Ohio residents receiving an associate, baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, or other postgraduate degree.” Grades will not matter; the grants will be made by lottery drawing.

HB 125 This bill comes out of the Governor’s State of the State speech. It imposes new fees on hospitals to offset Medicaid costs. This bill is controversial and the OHA and hospital are campaigning vigorously against it. It is in its early stages of the process and is in the House’s Health Care, Access and Affordability Committee. An average hospital will get about 25% of the new fee back through increased Medicaid payments.

HB 12 “Credit Cards” This bill restricts credit card marketing (so-called affinity agreements) on university campuses. It may come to a House vote in the near future. OSU has taken the lead to modify this bill and now maintains that we can all live with it.