

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 6/16/20

Like much of NJ, the legislature is still working remotely. Voting sessions are done via phone; committee meetings are on zoom. Normally, both houses hold concurrent voting sessions, and between the two houses, there are often 15 or more committees meeting on the same day. I'm not sure of exactly what the electronic constraints are, but the legislative zoom committee hearings are limited to one at a time. Usually two in one day, sometimes three. Consequently, there are committee hearings virtually every day! (That was honestly an unintentional word play, but fitting....)

The legislature really can't take work at its regular pace of business. Since voting sessions are done via phone, without the voting machinery available in the statehouse chambers, the votes are by roll call. Very long. A few legislators have suggested the statehouse should reopen soon, but the majority don't think it's necessary. We shall see.

Onto what's happening now. The last update focused on economic issues facing the state. On June 4, the Assembly approved the bill to authorize state bonding, although the Senate has yet to take this up. On Thursday, the Senate Budget Committee heard from Richard Keevey, who teaches public policy and both Rutgers and Princeton, and has held multiple government positions working on budgets. Keevey suggested to the committee that bonding is not a good idea, since it's a one-time source of revenue. Frankly, he didn't have good answers as to how the state could find enough revenue to replace the money the bonding would provide.

Confused about how the administration came up with the \$10 billion shortfall? John Reitmeyer explains the projection in his article *Checking the math*: <https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/06/explainer-checking-the-math-behind-murphys-10b-budget-shortfall-estimate/>. The state's budget shortfalls have resulted in holding the total pot of state aid flat for the moment, but our county colleges lost their operating aid through September. They face a dual challenge of decreased enrollment and less state aid, which you can read about here: <https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/06/the-great-unknowns-that-nj-community-colleges-must-confront-revenue-and-enrollments/>.

On the education policy side of things, the Senate Education Committee heard from the Commissioner of Education last week. Chair Theresa Ruiz blasted the Department of Education for its lack of timely information to schools and its inability to give answers on the digital divide. Read more about it here: <https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/06/repollet-gets-earful-from-lawmakers-over-lack-of-progress-in-closing-digital-divide/>

(Why do I often use articles from njspotlight.com? They have no paywall and when it comes to budgetary issues, no one explains it better than John Reitmeyer!)

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TAKE ACTION

Ask the assembly to take action on our bills: <https://actioncenter.njea.org/ask-the-assembly-to-act-today/> And keep on asking!

RESULTS FROM THURSDAY, JUNE 4

- A4175 - "New Jersey COVID-19 Emergency Bond Act," authorizes issuance of State bonds totaling \$5 billion and authorizes borrowing from federal government. (Support) (Passed in Assembly; Received in Senate and referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee)

RESULTS FROM FRIDAY, JUNE 5

- S277 - "Emma's Law"; requires school buses that transport students with special needs to be equipped with certain safety features. (Oppose) (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Senate)
- S485 - Requires school bus driver's complete motor vehicle driving record be shared with board of education or school bus contractor and local police. (Monitor) (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Senate)

RESULTS FROM WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

- A4006 - Postpones New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) review for certain school districts to accommodate disruption due to COVID-19 pandemic. (Support) (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly)
- A4227 - Ensures insurance coverage for certain persons attending school graduation exercises in July and August of 2020. (Monitor; Not applicable – insurance for students) (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Assembly)
- ACR171 - Petitions federal government for emergency response funding to help schools expand access to online instruction among economically disadvantaged students. (Support) (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly)

RESULTS FROM THURSDAY, JUNE 11

- S2518 Delays physical examination requirement for certain student-athletes who participate in school-sponsored athletic activities during fall athletic season of 2020-2021 school year. (Monitor) (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Senate)

RESULTS FROM MONDAY, JUNE 15

- A1408/S973 - Requires Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development to establish apprenticeship mentoring program for women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. (Support) (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly)
- S84 - "Timothy J. Piazza's Law"; expands scope of hazing activities and increases penalties for hazing resulting in injury; requires institutions of higher education, and public and nonpublic high schools and middle schools to adopt anti-hazing policies. (Support) (Passed in Senate)
- S2093 - Expands scope of activities constituting hazing; increases penalties for hazing resulting in injury; requires institutions of higher education and public and nonpublic high schools and middle schools to adopt anti-hazing policies. (Support) (Passed in Senate)
- S2518 - Delays physical examination requirement for certain student-athletes who participate in school-sponsored athletic activities during fall athletic season of 2020-2021 school year. (Monitor) (Passed in Senate)

BILLS TO BE CONSIDERED THURSDAY, JUNE 18

- A4142/S2383 - Requires Commissioner of Education to establish three-year "Bridge Year Pilot Program" for certain students who were impacted by public health state of emergency caused by coronavirus disease 2019.
- A4227 - Ensures insurance coverage for certain persons attending school graduation exercises in July and August of 2020. (Monitor; Not applicable – insurance for students)
- A4259 - Allows office of municipal clerk to receive voted mail-in ballots and applications for those ballots by hand delivery; extends deadline for mail-in ballots to be received and canvassed. (Monitor)
- S2496 - Allows municipal clerks to receive hand delivered voted mail-in ballots and applications; extends ballot receipt and election certification deadlines; increases certain messenger and bearer ballot limits. (Monitor)

BILLS TO BE CONSIDERED TUESDAY, JUNE 23

- A970 - Requires public schools to administer written screenings for depression for students in certain grades. (Support with concerns)

WHEN IS THE LEGISLATURE MEETING AGAIN?

- Wednesday, June 17 – Assembly State and Local Government and Senate Environment and Energy Committees
- Thursday, June 18 – Assembly Voting Session
- Monday, June 22 – Assembly Voting Session and Assembly Special Committee on Infrastructure and Natural Resources
- Tuesday June 23 – Assembly Health Committee
- Wednesday June 24 – Assembly Women and Children Committee
- Thursday, June 25 – Assembly Voting Session; Senate Quorum

- Monday, June 29 - Assembly and Senate Voting Session
- Tuesday June 30 - Assembly Voting Session

