



LAE's CAPITOL CONNECTION

Your weekly legislative update from the LAE lobby team

June 3, 2011

THE 2011 SESSION: SIX WEEKS DOWN, THREE TO GO!

Stay up to speed on important issues related to the 2011 Legislative Session. In addition to reading your *Capitol Connection*, be sure to check out www.lae.org for video recaps of LAE Lobby Team testimony. You can view testimony for the week of 5/30 – 6/3 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxxEC0jQKNY.

LAE PLAYS AN INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN PASSAGE OF SENATE BILL 6

SB 6, the retirement bill brought forth by Senator Butch Gautreaux, was debated by the full Senate this week. The bill, which requires employers who've terminated their participation in TRSL to pay their proportionate share of the unfunded accrued liability, passed with a unanimous vote of 38-0. LAE lobbied aggressively in favor of this bill, as it protects the solvency of TRSL. Please take a moment to thank your senators for their support. You can go to Capwiz right now to take action - <http://capwiz.com/nea/la/issues/alert/?alertid=49080526>.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION DEFEATS BESE LETTER GRADE MORATORIUM BILL

The Senate Committee on Education discussed Senator Jonathan Perry's bill, **SB 201**, in committee this week. LAE supported the bill that would delay the implementation of the new BESE-enforced letter grade system, which would assign performance-based school letter grades to public schools (including charter schools) and school districts. LAE President Joyce Haynes and Vice President Debbie Meaux testified in support of the bill; here's what they had to say:

"The current plan for the school district letter grades is unfair and potentially harmful to every public school district and every tax payer," said Haynes. "The letter grade ranges were devised in haste without an in depth study."

"I really believe that we need to take a look at some other method for indicating to the public what our schools are doing," said Meaux.

After a lengthy discussion, **SB 201** was defeated. **SB 35**, a similar bill brought forth by Senator Yvonne Dorsey, was on the agenda to be discussed, but the committee ended up delaying the discussion this week.

HOUSE SPEAKER TUCKER CALLS FOR TWO-THIRDS VOTE ON RETIREMENT BILL HB 479

House Speaker Jim Tucker argued against **HB 479** this week, calling the legislation a tax increase. **HB 479**, brought forth by Representative Kirk Talbot, proposes an increase in state employee contributions to their pension plans. Governor Jindal has insisted that he would veto any tax proposal that reaches his desk. The legislation that would trigger a 40 percent increase in what more than 50,000 state employees contribute to their retirement. Tucker cited state law and pointed out that any legislation involving an increase in taxes requires a two-thirds vote in both the House and Senate chambers. The governor's office spoke out against Tucker's allegations, calling his conclusions "incorrect facts and incorrect interpretation of the law." The governor's office referred to the employee retirement contributions as "deferred compensation" making the payment neither a fee nor a tax. After much debate, Representative Talbot postponed scheduled action on the legislation for this week.

GOVERNOR'S PLAN TO FREEZE SCHOOL AID ADVANCES WITH PASSAGE OF HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 130

HCR 130, the resolution that would freeze aid to public schools for the third consecutive year, is now one step closer to the governor's desk. The plan authorizes \$3.4 billion in basic state aid to public schools for the 2011-2012 school year. **LAE** expressed disappointment in the plan when it was approved by BESE late last year. BESE members said it made no sense to seek an increase in funding when the state budget faces a \$1.6 billion shortfall.

"We think it's time the governor dealt with state financing in a responsible way," said President Haynes. "The three year freeze will cost Louisiana's public schools close to \$200 million in recurring revenues. Instead of being instruments of the governor, the BESE Board needs to be representatives of the people."

In a news release, **LAE** pointed out that this isn't the first time Governor Jindal slighted public school funding. Late last year, he made a \$42 million error in the MFP when he failed to account for increases in student population. He also shorted the state's K-12 and higher education systems another \$68 million when he redirected the Federal Education Jobs grant. To date, districts still have not received the \$79 million residue from the \$147 million originally approved for Louisiana K-12 public schools.

Ultimately, **HCR 130** was approved without objection after a brief hearing and now faces action on the House floor. The **LAE** Lobby Team will keep you posted on the activity of this resolution as it moves through the remainder of the legislature.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE BILL PASSES SENATE

SB 67 was debated on the Senate floor this week. **LAE** supports the bill, brought forth by Senator President Pro Tem Sharon Broome that proposes trimming public school suspensions for certain students. Senators debated the bill for more than an hour, addressing concerns about the state interference in discipline issues. Senator Broome said that the changes would only apply to students from K-5 facing uniform and tardiness penalties. The Senate passed the **SB 67** with a vote of 25-10. **LAE** was instrumental in lobbying Senate members to amend the bill to remove BESE control. **LAE** thanks Senator Ben Nevers and Senator Robert Adley for their involvement pushing the bill forward.

HIGHER EDUCATION "SUPER BOARD" BILL STALLED IN COMMITTEE

Representative Thomas Carmody's bill, **HB 588**, was discussed this week. The bill that would abolish the Louisiana Board of Regents, the LSU System, the Southern University System, the University of Louisiana System and the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, proposes forming a single higher education "super board" to oversee colleges. During this week's meeting, the House Committee on Education had two, deadlocked 7-7 votes. The governor-backed constitutional amendment **HB 391** was approved by the same committee last week with a 10-4 vote. LSUnited Representative Steve Rushing spoke in opposition to the bill. This week's stalemate vote threw a kink in the plan, ultimately causing **HB 588** to be voluntarily deferred.

House Speaker Jim Tucker, who is sponsoring companion legislation **HB 391**, said he believes the committee will approve the legislation when more people are present. **HB391** must next go through the House Committee on Appropriations and it will require two-thirds support from the both the House and Senate. The bills have a tough road ahead with only three weeks left in the session.

OTHER BILL TRACKING AND UPDATES

The LAE Lobby Team will continue keeping a close eye on the following bills, here's a quick update on all of LAE's Bills to Watch:

Education Legislation

- Charter Schools: HB 421 would encourage corporations to partner with charter schools by allowing half of the seats in the school to be filled by children of the corporation employees, a minority percentage of the seats on the boards that govern the charter schools, and the corporations to provide "a facility or land to the charter school." **LAE opposes** this legislation. *This bill passed the House Education Committee and the full House of Representatives. It's now assigned to the Senate Education Committee for discussion.*

Retirement Legislation

- Retiree Return-to-Work: HB 151 would amend the definition of "retired teacher" in the TRSL return-to-work law to include any member who retired on or before June 30, 2010. (The current law only includes retired members who retired and returned to work on or before June 30, 2010.) **LAE supports HB 151**. *The bill was reported favorably by the House Committee on Retirement; it is currently awaiting House floor action. HB 369 and HB 417 allows retirees to return to work as substitute teachers without loss of retirement benefits with limitations placed on earnings. LAE supports this legislation with amendments on earnings limitations. HB 417 passed both the House Education Committee and the full House of Representatives and has been sent to the Senate Committee on Education for discussion.*
- Higher Ed Return-to-Work: HB 150 would allow a retiree to return to work as an adjunct professor without loss of retirement benefits. Limitations would be placed on earnings. **LAE supports** this legislation with amendments on earnings limitations.

The LAE Lobby Team will update these bills regularly for your reference. Go to www.lae.org/cms/2011+Legislative+Session%3A+Bills+to+Watch/212.html to track the progress of each bill.

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