

In the fifth week, the House takes up a range of bills



By Guest Columnist
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The fifth week of the 2022 legislative session proved to be the busiest that we have had so far this year. Committee meetings to discuss House bills wrapped up early in the week because of Tuesday's general bills deadline. We convened in the House Chamber for longer periods to discuss the legislation that made it to the calendar. We approximately discussed around 130 bills that were discussed with a variety of topics.

House Bill 1313 would establish the Fostering Access and Inspiring True Hope (FAITH) Scholarship Program. This scholarship program would provide financial assistance for postsecondary education to all current and former foster children under age 26. The financial assistance includes full tuition, fees, and room and board. We named the program after Representative Bill Kinkade (from Marshall County), who grew up in the foster system. HB 1313 passed by a vote of 118-4.

House Concurrent Resolution 14 recognizes and honors Vietnam War Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. During the introduction of the concurrent resolution, Amendment 1 was brought forth adding Representative Manly Barton and Representative Mac Huddleston. Both Rep. Barton and Rep. Huddleston bravely served in the Vietnam War. HC 14 passed unanimously by a vote of 122-0 and has been sent to the Senate.

The Mississippi Health Care Workers Retention Act of 2022 (House Bill 764) was introduced on Wednesday. The bill would appropriate \$56 million of the federal American Rescue Plan to the Mississippi Department of



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On February 4, the legislators had their inaugural meeting of the Mississippi Legislative First Responders Caucus. This group is working on HB 779 that will cover state law enforcement officers, firefighters, and first responders just like the federal law does for line of duty death.

Health. These funds would be used to pay health care workers who directly treated COVID-19 up to \$5,000 if they agree to stay at their current facility for five months. Mississippi, among other states, has seen massive health care worker shortages since the start of the pandemic. The bill passed by a bipartisan vote of 112-6.

HB 512 would remove the Department of Revenue from being the wholesale distributor of alcohol within the state and allow for wholesale permits to be issued to private companies. The Department of Revenue currently operates the Alcoholic Beverage Control warehouse in Gluckstadt. A similar bill was passed last session by the House, but it died in conference. HB 512 passed 113-2 and has been sent to the Senate.

The Second Amendment Preservation Act (HB 1418) would preempt any

federal legislation seeking to ban firearms, ammunition and other supplies, excluding universities and colleges. After little debate, the bill passed by a vote of 83-35.

HB 621 would increase certain penalties for the crime of fleeing from law enforcement. Under current law, a person who is found guilty of operating a motor vehicle in a reckless or willfully dangerous manner and fleeing from law enforcement could receive up to five years in prison. HB 621 would increase this time to 10 years. A reverse repealer was added by amendment ensuring the bill will go to conference before the end of the legislative session. The bill passed by a vote of 84-34.

Many bills passed the House with overwhelming majority, including a bill to create an interstate compact for audiology and speech-language pathology licenses (House Bill 424); the

Sexual Assault Response for College Students Act (House Bill 589); two bills creating the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund (House Bills 606 and 1064); a bill prohibiting discrimination against a recipient of an organ donation based on disability (House Bill 20); two bills increasing salaries for Mississippi Highway Patrol and Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Officers (House Bills 1344 and 1422); a bill creating the Mississippi Healthy Food and Families Program (House Bill 555); and the College Sticker Price Act of 2022 (House Bill 464).

On February 4, we had our inaugural meeting of the Mississippi Legislative First Responders Caucus. Having served as a First Responder and a member of the Scott County Dive team, I want this organization to lead the way in passing legislation that affects our brave men and women all across our State.

One of the main issues that First Responders Caucus is pushing this year that we passed on the House floor is HB 779. HB 779 is a bill that will cover just like the federal law does for line of duty death to our Law Enforcement Officers, Firefighters, and First Responders. We are also still working to try to come up with an opportunity to cover employees that work for private companies, like our ambulance companies and other health care workers.

Floor debate will continue on general bills until the February 10 deadline. After that, discussion will move to appropriation and revenue bills, as well as bills originating in the Senate.

As always, please feel free to contact me for any matters you wish to bring to my attention. You can follow us along at the Legislature's YouTube channel to watch some floor debates, including those from last week. The YouTube channel address is www.youtube.com/c/MississippiLegislature.

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