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Committees:

Public Health
Public Safety
Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee
on Public Health and Social Services

Oklahoma House of Representatives

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Weekly Review

Committee Votes to Require DHS to Provide Information on Unsuccessful Adoptions

Legislation that would require the Oklahoma Department of Human Services to provide statistics on unsuccessful adoptions has been passed by the House Human Services Committee.

State Rep. Jason Murphey (R-Guthrie), who is sponsoring Senate Bill 794 in the House, said the issue was brought up by officials with Peppers Ranch, a constituent organization located in Guthrie that houses troubled youth.

Failed adoptions lead children to feel unwanted, Amber Given, the program director for Peppers Ranch, said.

She said there is a growing trend of children coming into higher levels of care and group care because their adoptive placements have not worked out. Repeated failed adoptions leave those children with many

DHS publishes statistics on its successful adoptions and should have to show how many were unsuccessful, Murphey said. He said better reporting would help lawmakers develop policies that make adoptions more successful.

Senate Bill 794 will next receive a vote from the full Oklahoma House of Representatives. Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, authored the measure in the state Senate, where it passed 47-0.

Committee Approves Protections for Pregnant Women

Legislation increasing legal protections for pregnant women and their unborn children received committee approval this week.

Senate Bill 1103, by state Sen. Glenn Coffee and state Rep. Mike Thompson, would create the "Use of Force for the Protection of the Unborn Act."

Under the bill, a pregnant woman would be legally justified in using deadly force if she "reasonably believes" an attacker is "threatening her unborn child" and "use of force or deadly force are immediately necessary to protect her unborn child."

According to the American Pregnancy Association, 240,000 pregnant women are subject to domestic violence each year and pregnant women face twice the risk of battery.

Senate Bill 1103 passed the House Judiciary Committee. It now proceeds to the floor of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. The bill previously passed the state Senate 44-0.

Legislation Changing the State's Apportionment Commission Passes Committee

Legislation ensuring bipartisanship on the state Apportionment Commission unanimously passed a House committee this week.

The Apportionment Commission, which is renamed the Bipartisan Commission on Legislative Apportionment in the bill, is currently comprised of the state Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Attorney General and the state Treasurer. The commission is responsible for writing new legislative district lines following a federal census if the Legislature is unable within 90 days to compromise on the redrawing of the districts.

Senate Joint Resolution 25, by House Speaker Chris Benge (R-Tulsa), would change the make-up of the commission to ensure it is made up of equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats.

The resolution, which would go to a vote of the people if approved by the Legislature, would give the governor, Speaker of the House and President Pro Tem of the Senate two appointments to the commission, one Republican and one Democrat each. The lieutenant governor would also serve on the commission as a non-voting member and as chair of the commission.

The resolution passed the House Rules Committee with bipartisan support and will now move to the full House for consideration.

Lawmakers Vote to Support Organ Donations

Lawmakers have voted to standardize Oklahoma law on organ donation so it mirrors other state laws across the country and increases the likelihood citizens' lives will be saved through transplants.

Senate Bill 622, by state Sen. Glenn Coffee and state Rep. Doug Cox, creates the "Uniform Anatomical Gift Act."

Cox, an emergency room physician, said the bill will bring Oklahoma law into line with other state laws on organ donation, effectively streamlining national policy to increase efficiency.

While most people are familiar with the success of heart and kidney transplants, Cox said medical advances now allow the use of a wide range other organs such as the eye, bone, or even tendons for knee reconstruction surgery.

Cox said the practices codified by Senate Bill 622 are already being employed in Oklahoma. However, the legislation will ensure those practices will withstand any potential legal challenge.

The bill also specifies that the Medical Examiner's Office has the right to examine any body before organ donations are made in cases where foul play is suspected.

Senate Bill 622 passed the House Judiciary Committee. It now proceeds to the floor of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. The bill has already passed the state Senate on a 47-0 vote.

Lawmakers Keep Nuclear Discussion Going

Efforts to promote nuclear power continued this week with committee passage of another bill to incentivize construction of new power plant in Oklahoma.

Senate Bill 831, by state Sen. Brian Bingman and state Rep. Scott Martin, would create the "Nuclear Energy Incentives Act." The measure is similar to a bill authored by Martin that already passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives on a bipartisan 60-19 vote.

Senate Bill 831, which already cleared the state Senate on a 36-9 vote, would establish a review process for the Oklahoma Corporation Commission to consider nuclear power proposals and creates a task force to consider tax changes to encourage construction of a nuclear power plant.

Martin said he is working with ratepayers, utilities, environmental groups and other interested parties on the legislation.

Senate Bill 831 passed out of the House Energy Committee today. It now proceeds to the floor of the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Statewide Office Term Limits Passes House Committee

Statewide office holders are one legislative step away from not being able to become entrenched in office with passage of term limits legislation by a House committee.

Senate Joint Resolution 12 would place term limits on most statewide office holders. The change would have to be approved by a vote of the people if passed by the Legislature.

Currently, state lawmakers are limited to 12 years in office, and the governor is restricted to serving two consecutive, four year terms. SJR 12, by House author Rep. Jason Murphey (R-Guthrie), would instead limit the governor to serve no more than eight cumulative years in office.

That same eight total years rule would also apply to the Lt. Gov, State Auditor and Inspector, Attorney General, State Treasurer, Commissioner of Labor, Superintendent of Public Instruction and Insurance Commissioner, all of whom serve 4-year terms.

The resolution also would limit anyone from serving as Corporation Commissioner for more than a total of 12 years.

The resolution passed the House Rules Committee and will now be considered for final passage by the full House.

House Committee Approves Voter ID Legislation

Legislation requiring photo identification to cast a ballot passed a House committee this week.

Senate Bill 4 would require citizens to provide "proof of identity" before voting. Under the bill, proof of identity could be established by producing a document containing a photograph of the voter that was issued by a state, federal, county, municipal, or tribal government.

The legislation also would allow voters to cast a ballot if they showed their free voter identification card issued by the state election board.

If the voter is unable to provide any proof of identity, they would be allowed to sign a statement under oath swearing to his or her identity. Anyone found to have signed the oath falsely would be subject to felony punishment.

The bill also extends the state's early voting, allowing Oklahomans to start voting at 1 p.m. the Wednesday prior to a general election. Currently, Oklahomans can vote early on the Friday, Saturday and Monday prior to an election.

Senate Bill 4 passed the House Rules Committee today and will now move to the full House for consideration. Senate Bill 692 also passed the committee, which would send similar language to a vote of the people.

As your Representative, I will always strive to be pro-business by reducing the burdens of government regulation on the Free enterprise system. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 1-800-522-8502.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rep. Mike Ritze".

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