

# Legislative Newsletter

Feb. 5, 2021



Housing bills and the Governor's proposed Back the Blue bill were at the forefront of Week 4, and there was plenty of debate in both chambers. **House Study Bill 178/Senate Study Bill 1142** from the Governor's Office pertains to housing shortages and development. The bill creates a housing tax credit program (income, insurance premium, franchise/money and credits) and requires the Iowa Financial Authority (IFA) to develop a process and approve credits for ownership in qualifying housing investments. The credit can be claimed at any point over a ten-year period, and it can be carried forward for ten years but not refunded.

The bill also strikes the cap of \$3 million from the real estate transfer tax to the Housing Trust. Additionally, in the bill, this proposal increases the allocation for workforce housing credits to \$50 million and the reservation for small cities to \$20 million, with the credits repealing in July 2024.

In terms of disaster funding, the bill permits IFA to transfer unused money from specified funds for disaster relief housing, upon permission from the Governor. The bill establishes a program to help people whose primary homes are damaged in a disaster; as part of the program, the IFA may work with local program administrators in cities on disaster housing and eviction relief after an emergency has been declared, and includes forgivable loans and grants, as well as reporting requirements, eviction prevention programs and other provisions.

Finally, the bill has provisions related to brownfields; it allows the EDA to allocate \$20 million for credits to redevelop brownfields and extends the brownfield credit program to 2031.

After a somewhat tense subcommittee early in the week, the Senate's Local Government Committee passed **Senate Study Bill 1079**, which prohibits cities and counties from adopting ordinances that prohibit landlords from refusing to accept federal housing vouchers and void existing ordinances; in essence, opponents of the bill testified, it legalizes housing discrimination. This bill passed the committee largely on party lines, 7-3. A House companion bill has also been introduced, **House Study Bill 171**.

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The Governor's "Back the Blue" bill was also introduced in the Senate this week (**Senate Study Bill 1140**). Despite several conversations about our concerns and proposals for the bill, the Senate version is the exact same legislation that was drafted prior to our meeting. In addition to our concerns related to data collection and that "false complaint" would still not be defined in Iowa Code, several local governments have expressed frustration at the prospect of having to justify their budgetary decisions to the Governor of Iowa; these governments have also expressed concern that this means they will have to make budgetary decisions based upon the desires of the executive branch as opposed to the needs of their jurisdictions. Several other law enforcement groups have come out against the bill as it is written, as well.

In the Senate chamber, **Senate File 183** was debated and passed. This is the public improvements contracts bill, which prohibits selection of an architect, engineer or landscape architect based on fees and prohibits the Regents from using design-build contracts. The bill includes other prohibitions and allowances. The bill passed on party lines, 28-19.

Across the rotunda, the Senate passed **House File 232**: One of the disorderly conduct bills. It requires that a person intentionally or recklessly cause unreasonable distress when making a loud noise that causes distress to the neighbors to be considered disorderly conduct.

There was also copious committee work this week. The House Ways & Means Committee voted to pass **House Study Bill 40**. This bill allows a county to charge a convenience fee of up to \$10 for issuing or renewing a driver's license for a person who is not a county resident, unless the person can show proof that they pay property taxes in the county. This bill passed 16-2. The House State Government Committee unanimously approved **House Study Bill 54**, which is the 411 bill. This bill defines an ordinary disability beneficiary as a member retired for less than five years. It would allow such a beneficiary to apply for an accidental disability benefit. The bill increases the employee contribution to 9.55 percent. Cities are required to offer hospitalization and medical benefits for injuries received on duty to members who are receiving disability benefits. Finally, it requires a firefighter or police officer to be granted a leave without loss of pay if the person has been exposed to an infectious disease.

Introduced bills/Successor bills:

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**Senate Study Bill 1155:** This bill would include public land available for private recreational use.

**Senate File 228:** This bill allows local governments to publish notices on the internet in lieu of publishing in newspapers and requires the government to identify a site where a paper copy can be picked up and to develop a process for people to sign up to receive notices. This is one of many unfunded mandates that we have tried to get considered by the General Assembly that would maintain transparency but also save local governments many thousands of dollars in publication costs.

**House Study Bill 166:** This bill prohibits cities and counties from regulating the sale of natural gas or propane. The subcommittee will be in Week 5.

House Study Bill 129 (on-site transactional businesses traditionally operated by children) is now **House File 313**.

Typically, this week would be the first funnel deadline, which is a legislative mechanism that disposes of legislation which has not advanced to a certain point in the legislative process. However, according to the Legislature's session timetable, the first funnel deadline has been delayed to March 5 this year.

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