

### Legislative Update from Brandon Storm



Severe winter weather that blanketed the Commonwealth last week has left thousands without electricity and some even without heat. It is my sincere hope that you and your family remained safe and warm. I stay inspired by our linemen and road workers' committed efforts as they brave the elements to keep the world turning for all of us. You may have seen the photos online of the conditions these folks have been working in. We should be grateful. Also deserving credit are local officials who have taken the necessary action to provide a local response amid power outages, and of course, our first responders who remain on duty rain, sleet, or shine.

Due to the condition of roadways and low temperatures, official legislative work was postponed last week. The safety of staff and members of the General Assembly were prioritized. Rather than getting on treacherous roadways, meetings were held virtually, and work was done remotely where it could be. No committee meetings were held, nor was there any activity in the House or Senate chambers. The General Assembly is scheduled to reconvene on Monday, February 22 at 4:00 p.m.

Even though the session was postponed, the legislature remains focused on its efforts. I look forward to returning to Frankfort this week to continue working on your behalf and for our state and the 21st District's betterment.

Constituents across the Commonwealth are asking when they can get their COVID-19 vaccinations. Many are reaching out on behalf of elderly parents or those with underlying health conditions who are more susceptible to the virus. I am hopeful for more attention to rural communities and higher prioritization of the most vulnerable. For those of you who have concerns, my best advice at this time is an encouragement to visit this link: govstatus.egov.com/ky-covid-vaccine, where you can view all the latest information about the state's vaccine distribution efforts. The website provides details on how a vaccine may be received, along with the distribution phases outlined by the Department for Public Health. If you have trouble accessing the internet, please call 855-598-2246 or (800) 722-5725 with any questions you may have about getting registered to get your vaccination.

A significant development we learned about recently is related to the tens of thousands of outstanding unemployment claims that have yet to be resolved. During such inclement weather, I cannot help but think of the individuals who have struggled to pay their bills and who have not received the unemployment benefits that may allow them to do so.

A recent report published by Kentucky State Auditor Mike Harmon indicates over 400,000 emails sent to the administration regarding unemployment claims have yet to be opened. There is no doubt this includes people right here in our district whose claims have not received attention. Additionally, it appears several payments were backdated, and some folks received benefits for which they did not qualify. The full report lists additional findings. You can view it at auditor.ky.gov.

I know a lot of people continue to struggle, and severe weather only serves to make life more difficult. Be sure to follow severe weather safety tips. By visiting kyem.ky.gov, you can find useful information to prepare for bad weather. Please know that you remain in my prayers. Join me in continued prayer for our local road department workers, linemen, first responders, and everyone who may be struggling right now. I trust that brighter and warmer days are ahead of us.

It is a real honor to represent Laurel, Jackson, Estill, Powell, Menifee, and Bath Counties in the Kentucky State Senate. If you have any questions about public policy issues or any other matter of importance to you, do not hesitate to contact my office toll-free by calling 502-564-8100. You can also email me at Brandon.Storm@lrc.ky.gov. Stay safe. God bless.

### Legislative Update From Representative Goforth

#### Last half of session promises to be busy By Representative Robert Goforth



I have often heard that if you do not like the weather in Kentucky, just hang on and it will change. That certainly seems to be true as we enjoy milder temperatures this week after last week's snow and ice.

I know it has been a tough couple of weeks, but we can all appreciate the fact that so many people stepped up to help friends and neighbors. I want to thank the state and county road crews for working day and night to clear our roads. I also want to share my appreciation of law enforcement and emergency responders for braving the cold weather and icy conditions to protect and serve our community.

Unfortunately, the inclement weather forced the legislature to reschedule three legislative days, but we hit the ground running when we returned to the Capitol on February 23.

In addition to the budget, there are still several important issues left to address, including these bills that have passed committee and are waiting for a vote on the House Floor.

HB 190 - Restaurants selling inventory as groceries: Restaurants have been affected more than any other sector of our economy by the shutdowns, limited capacity orders, and increased supply costs caused by the pandemic. HB 190 would allow food service establishments to sell inventory items like bread, milk, and other food staples as groceries. Restaurants often order food weeks in advance, and many lost money because they had to either donate their inventory or watch it spoil.

HB 84 - Tax exemption for disaster response: This bill would provide an income tax exemption for disaster response employees and businesses that work during a state of emergency. This would incentivize businesses and individuals to provide emergency services when Kentucky is in need.

HB 140 - Using telehealth to increase health care accessibility: HB 140 would make permanent the temporary telehealth provisions put into place at the beginning of the pandemic and included in SB 150, which we passed during the 2020 Session. Approximately 70 percent of Kentucky physicians have used telehealth to safely deliver medical care over the past year. If we want all Kentuckians to have access to quality medical care, telehealth is a tool that has proven its value.

HB 212 - Child and Maternal Health: If we are going to craft good legislation that benefits our state for years to come, we need accurate information and data. Kentucky ranks 24th in the nation in infant mortality, and the likelihood that a Kentucky woman will die from pregnancy-related causes has more than doubled in recent years. We know that race, income, and geography play a huge role in health outcomes and that there are real inequalities in our healthcare system. Evidence based interventions that protect the lives of patients are critical, and I know my colleagues and I are committed to addressing these inequalities. However, we must first have the appropriate data, and HB 212 is a giant leap in gathering it.

HB 25 - Building an educated workforce: I think we can all agree that those who break the law must face the consequences of their actions. Equally important, however, is that they must be able to return to society as law-abiding citizens who contribute to their communities. Currently, if a student earns scholarship money through the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship Program, they cannot use it if they are convicted of a felony. This kind of reminds me of the old saying that an eye for an eye only leaves everyone blind. We know that access to education can help keep people from reentering the criminal justice system. This bill would allow students to access the scholarship money they have rightfully earned and help put them on a better path forward.

HB 208 - Education relief: HB 208 builds on the work we did at the end of last session to give schools the flexibility they need to accommodate the needs of students during COVID-19. I have received some messages from folks who believe this bill would allow schools to remain closed, and I want to clarify that it would not. Kentucky's school system is so diverse that a one-size fits all approach simply does not work, and HB 208 provides some flexibility to address those differences. I agree with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that schools are among the safest places for children during this pandemic. I want our schools to open safely.

HB 272 - Protecting rural water service: Water associations and districts provide clean drinking water to many Kentuckians. They operate on tight budgets and must have a reliable cash flow to continue serving their customers. The Public Service Commission recently began ordering that they stop charging a fee for late payments. As you can imagine, this not only eliminates an incentive to pay bills on time but puts cash-strapped water districts in danger of bankruptcy. While some people legitimately need help paying bills during this pandemic, there are more effective ways to address those needs. HB 272 would prevent the Public Service Commission from modifying, rejecting, or suspending late payment charges levied by water districts and associations.

HB 75 - Helping live organ donors: Thousands of Kentuckians are waiting for organ transplants, many of which could be performed through a live organ donation. Live organ donations can be taken from living donors and include kidney, liver, pancreas, and intestinal transplants and donations. However, donors sometimes face a disadvantage in acquiring disability, life, and long-term care insurance. HB 75 would prevent insurance companies from discriminating when offering, issuing, or pricing insurance as it pertains to the living organ donation status.

I hope you will not hesitate to reach out to me to share your thoughts on the issues before us in Frankfort. I can be reached during the week from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. (EST) through the toll-free message line at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via e-mail at Robert.Goforth@lrc.ky.gov. You can view all legislation at legislature.ky.gov.

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### Attention JCHS Juniors & Parents

As part of the state assessment, the ACT will be given to all Juniors on Tuesday March 9, 2021. More information will be announced soon through our one call system, school email, and Facebook. If you have not received any information by March 1 or you have additional questions, you may call or email Randi Moore at JCHS, 606-287-7155 or randi.moore@jackson.kyschools.us