



Newsletter From Rep. Jack Fortner District 4

March 8, 2019

Week 8 of 2019 Regular Session



Arkansas ranks forty-fourth in the nation when it comes to maternal mortality rates. Maternal mortality is defined as the death of a woman who is pregnant or dies within 42 days after the end of the pregnancy.

Arkansas currently has 35 maternal deaths per one hundred thousand 100,000 live births, compared with the national average of 20 deaths per one hundred thousand 100,000 live births, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Thirty-five states in the nation either conduct or are preparing to conduct organized maternal mortality reviews that help prevent maternal death through data collection, data analysis, and implementation of recommendations.

With roughly half of pregnancy-related deaths being preventable, state maternal mortality review committees can be instrumental to as to understanding why women are dying during pregnancy, childbirth, and the year postpartum. The committees also help in improving maternal health and preventing future deaths.

This week, the House passed legislation to create such a review committee in Arkansas with HB1440. Arkansas also ranks 46th in the nation for infant mortality.

In 2018, almost eleven percent 11% of babies born in Arkansas were preterm.

To improve infant mortality, the House also passed HB1441 which directs the Department of Health to establish the Maternal and Perinatal Outcomes Quality Review Committee. This committee will review data on births and develop strategies for improving birth outcomes.

On Monday, the House passed two pieces of legislation addressing highway funding.

In a vote of 71-26, the House passed SB336. This bill outlines \$95 million in additional funding in three ways.

First, it diverts all revenue from casino gaming that exceeds \$31.2 million to the State Highway and Transportation Department Fund.

Second, it includes a wholesale tax on fuel raising gas prices by 3 cents a gallon and diesel by 6 cents a gallon.

And third, it imposes a \$100 registration fee on hybrid vehicles and a \$200 registration fee on electric vehicles.

The second piece of legislation addressing highways before the House was HJR8.

This is a proposed constitutional amendment which would permanently extend a ½ cent sales tax for the purpose of funding state highways. The current ½ sales tax funding highway improvements is set to expire in 2023. This resolution will be on the ballot for voter approval in November 2020.

Other legislation passing the House this week includes:

HB1522-This ensures that soldiers and airmen of the Arkansas National Guard are afforded the same benefits and protections as active duty soldiers when they are called on state active duty.

HB1407-This bill requires truth in labeling of agricultural products that are edible. The bill states the seller cannot sell the product under the name of another food.

HB1263-This bill allows pharmacists to prescribe certain types of tobacco cessation products.

HB1278-This bill allows pharmacists to administer childhood vaccines to children age 7 and older under a written protocol by a physician.

HB1565-This bill seeks to provide funding for a national cancer institute-designated center at UAMS. The bill provides the funding by diverting existing taxes on medical marijuana from general revenue to the institute trust fund. The trust fund would also receive new revenue created by a 50 cents per pack tax on cigarette rolling papers, removing a border tax exemption on cigarettes and increasing the minimum mark price on cigarettes. In addition, HB1565 raises the legal age to use or possess vape or tobacco products to 21, with an exception for military.

HB1506-This bill imposes a criminal penalty (class A misdemeanor on first offense & class D felony on second offense) for theft of items from a cemetery or grave site.

HB1251-This bill amends the definition of practice of optometry.

HB1569-This bill allows school districts to develop policies for distribution of excess food. As long as health department standards are met, this bill would allow schools to give students the left-over food from lunch to take home.

HB1290-This bill allows pharmacists to provide access to oral contraceptives.

And SB10 which prohibits level 3 and level 4 sex offenders from wearing a costume or passing out candy during the two weeks before and after Halloween.

The House will enter the 9th week of the session on Monday. You can watch all House proceedings at www.arkansashouse.org