



Newsletter From Rep. Kenneth B. Ferguson District 64

March 15, 2019

Week 9 of 2019 Regular Session



This week, the House passed legislation which will drastically change the way our communities respond to emergencies, the way we regulate our businesses and the way our government is structured.

One of the many bills passed on the House floor in the 9th week of the session was The Arkansas Public Safety Act (HB1564).

This bill transforms the state's 911 network. It will shift the network from the current analog system to an internet protocol-based network. New technology will allow callers to use wireless and IP-based devices to call 911 and transmit text, images, video, and data.

It will consolidate the number of Public Safety Answering Points in the state in an effort to reduce the number of times a caller is transferred.

To fund upgrades, the bill increases the public safety charges on cell phones from 65 cents/month to \$1.30/month. It also places a 10% tax on prepaid cellular plans.

In 2016, counties and cities subsidized 911 by \$25 million. The changes outlined in HB1564 are expected to reduce the burden on counties and cities by \$16 million.

Another bill passed this week aims to reduce the amount of red tape on business owners in Arkansas.

In a vote of 92-0, the House passed HB1527. This bill requires the Legislative Council to review each occupational authorization and each occupational entity on an annual rotating basis.

Last year, Arkansas became one of eleven states chosen to participate in the Occupational Licensing Policy Learning Consortium, an initiative funded by a grant from the United States Department of Labor and supported in partnership with

the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, and the National Governors Association.

Governor Asa Hutchinson appointed 17 individuals to the Red Tape Reduction Working Group to review and address occupational licensing regulations that create unnecessary barriers to labor market entry.

HB1527 was one of the recommendations from the working group. This bill requires that the occupational authorizations and the occupational entities be divided into 6 groups. The Legislative Council will review one group each year to ensure it is the least restrictive form of authorization while still protecting consumers.

With a vote of 82-0 and 10 members voting present, the House passed the Transformation and Efficiencies Act of 2019.

This bill reduces the number of cabinet-level agencies by nearly 65 percent, from 42 to 15. A cabinet level secretary will serve as the executive head of each department.

The departments listed in the bill are:

- The Department of Agriculture
- The Department of Commerce
- The Department of Corrections
- The Department of Education
- The Department of Energy and Environment
- The Department of Finance and Administration
- The Department of Health
- The Department of Human Services
- The Department of the Inspector General
- The Department of Labor and Licensing
- The Department of the Military
- The Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism
- The Department of Public Safety
- The Department of Transformation and Shared Services
- The Department of Veterans Affairs

Other legislation passing the House this week includes:

HB1409-requires elementary schools to provide at least 40 minutes of recess.

HB1750-requires the Department of Transportation to annually provide legislators with the location of the most congested and most dangerous routes in the state. It also requires the department to list expenditures on highways in each congressional district.

HB1631-states the maximum speed limit for a vehicle on a controlled-access highway is 75 mph if the highway is located outside an urban area and has at least 4 lanes that are divided by a median strip.

HB1625-makes the act of encouraging suicide a Class D felony.

HB1689-increases the penalties for passing an authorized vehicle stopped on a highway. It increases the maximum fine from \$500 to \$1,000.

HB1647-amends the eligibility requirements for the Arkansas Academic Challenge Scholarship to include the applicant's superscore on the ACT.

HB1552-allows for licensing of DACA recipients for nursing licenses.