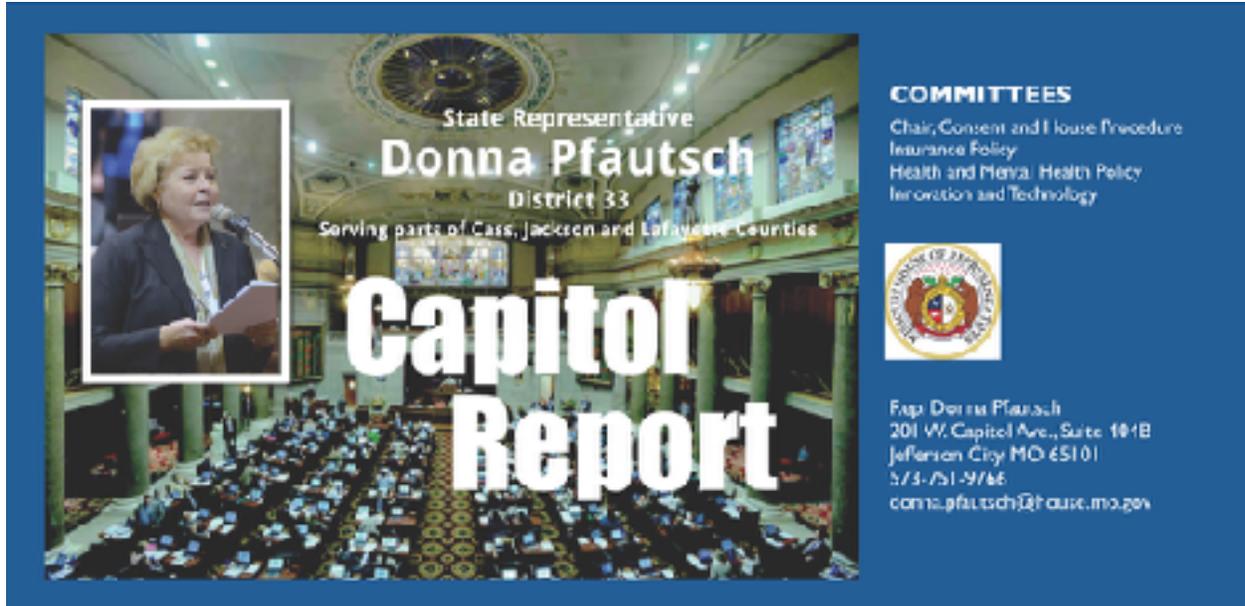


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The graphic features a background image of the Missouri State Capitol interior. In the foreground, a large group of people is seated in a hearing room. A smaller inset image shows Donna Pfautsch speaking at a podium. Text on the graphic includes: 'State Representative Donna Pfautsch District 33 Serving parts of Cass, Jackson and Lafayette Counties' and 'Capitol Report' in large white letters. On the right side, there is a list of committees, the Missouri State Seal, and contact information for Rep. Donna Pfautsch.

COMMITTEES
Chair, Consent and House Procedure
Insurance Policy
Health and Mental Health Policy
Innovation and Technology

Rep. Donna Pfautsch
201 W. Capitol Ave., Suite 104B
Jefferson City, MO 65101
573-751-9766
con.pfautsch@house.mo.gov

Friends:

The Capitol hearing rooms and House floor are bustling with activity. Just this week, the total of House bills filed reached 2,292 for this session. Many will be heard and just a few bills will move to the Senate for consideration. Below is a glimpse of the activity taking place in the Capitol. With so many bills, your representatives have a daunting task ahead.

Developing Missouri's Workforce (HB 1465)

The House of Representatives approved legislation this week to help ensure Missouri's system of higher education is working to meet the state's workforce and education needs. HB 1465 would give institutions greater flexibility to offer degrees that meet the needs of their local communities and businesses. The bill would in effect allow community colleges to offer four-year baccalaureate degrees in certain programs.

HB 1465 is meant to address the lack of skilled workers in certain fields in various parts of the state. To address the workforce shortage, a community college could apply to the Coordinating Board of Higher Education to offer a four-year degree in a field that is underemployed. Community colleges would need to meet several standards in order to be approved and would need to show there are no other available options like collaborating with a four-year university.

The community college would also need to prove the program is necessary to address a workforce shortage, and that the institution has the ability to provide a high-quality program. All 22 of the state's public universities and colleges have agreed to the language in the bill. They say the legislation will give students all over the state greater access to educational opportunities, and help to further develop the state's workforce.

The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

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Expanding Virtual School Options for Missouri Students (HB 1408)

House members also gave initial approval to a piece of legislation meant to better prepare young people for success in the workforce. The bill approved by the House is meant to expand course options and access for K-12 students. The legislation would change the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MOVIP) to "The Missouri Course Access Program" (MCAP) and allow any K-12 student to enroll in MCAP courses.

The Missouri Virtual Instruction Program was established in 2007 to offer online courses to public, private, and home school students. The program allows students to take advanced courses that are not currently offered by their local school districts. The existing MOVIP has seen funding dwindle in recent years, which has limited free tuition to students who are unable to attend traditional schools because of health issues. As a result, many students in districts without certain high-level math, science, and advanced placement courses are not able to enroll in these courses online.

The legislation approved this week would change the program so that it does not rely on a direct appropriation, but would instead redirect a portion of the per-pupil funding provided by the state. In order to give students in all parts of the state access to advanced coursework, the legislation would allow students to take online courses that would be paid by the school district or charter school. Students would be eligible if they have attended the school for at least one semester, and the course is not available in the school district. The bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to review the online courses to ensure they meet state standards. HB 1408 gives students the opportunity to take courses that their school does not offer, especially in the case of small schools unable to hire teachers for advanced or specialized subject areas. This bill is meant to make education fair, equitable, and accessible.

The bill now awaits a final vote in the House before moving to the Senate for consideration.

Other Bills Moving Out of the House

HB 1287 would specify that commercial insurers are exempt from filing rates and policy forms with respect to certain lines of commercial insurance. Supporters say the bill is necessary to update and modernize the regulations for large premium highly complex insurance policies.

HB 1381 would establish procedures relating to financial accreditation standards for insurance companies and an insurance group's corporate governance. Supporters say the legislation is a model act from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners that will make reporting consistent across the board. They say it is necessary for company accreditation in Missouri.

Lawmakers Receive 2018 State of the Judiciary Address

Members of the House and Senate gathered in the House Chamber this week to listen to the annual State of the Judiciary address. Delivered by Chief Justice Zel Fischer, the address provided lawmakers with an overview of the state's court system and the challenges it faces.

Fischer used his speech to highlight the need for expanded drug treatment courts to help fight against the abuse of opioids in Missouri. He noted that drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, and that the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids continues to rise. Missouri saw a significant increase in overdose deaths with 1,066 people losing their lives in 2015 and 1,371 in 2016. Fischer said drug courts are more cost-

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effective than any other criminal justice strategy to address the growing problem, but 15 counties in Missouri currently have no access to any type of treatment court. He pledged to work with lawmakers to help make the treatment courts available in every jurisdiction in the state.

Fischer also called on legislators to work with the court to develop solutions for the challenges faced by the state's criminal justice system. He explained that Missouri is not seeing a decrease in violent crimes as has been the trend nationally. Fischer also pointed out that Missouri is spending more than ever before on corrections as the incarceration rate continues to be well above the national average. He said a task force has spent time looking at ways to keep spending for corrections in check and reinvest those savings in evidence-based strategies to reduce recidivism. He asked legislators to work with the court to support legislation that will produce "significant, sensible, and meaningful improvements."

Fischer highlighted the efforts of a second task force that is focused broadly on criminal justice. He said the group will recommend risk-assessment tools for determining a defendant's suitability for pre-trial release, and recommend ways to improve how courts impose fines, fees, and costs. "It seems obvious and important that – before a trial is held and guilt or innocence is determined – we reserve our jail space for those who pose the most danger to the community for risk of fleeing the jurisdiction, and not those who simply may be too poor to post bail," said Fischer.

As a reminder, you can always go to house.mo.gov to check the status of any bill. Please don't hesitate to contact me by phone or email to share your thoughts and opinions.

Donna