

## 2021 INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY WEEK 2

- Week 2's significant developments included the Governor's announcement of his proposed budget, State House security issues as a result of the previous week's riots in DC and the upcoming presidential inauguration, and issues surrounding health and safety protocol violations at the State House and who should be enforcing them.
- All in all, it was a busy week, as committees began to meet in earnest. Legislators have introduced approximately 1,000 bills and 8 specific joint resolutions. A major focus of legislation is aimed at the Governor's authority during an emergency, as well as that of local health departments, civil liability of individuals and businesses due to COVID-19 and funding for education.
- The State House will be closed on Monday January 18th in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The General Assembly will get back to work on Tuesday. The House of Representatives will meet in session only once (Thursday) next week. Committees will be meeting all other days. The Senate continues working on its normal schedule, both for session and committees.
- Governor Holcomb will present his State of the State address on Tuesday evening next week, but it will look a lot different than usual. Due to COVID-19, there will not be a traditional joint session of the General Assembly to which he will speak. Instead, the Governor will give the speech in the House of Representatives Chamber, but only with legislative leaders and perhaps a few other people present.
- Governor Holcomb unveiled his proposed \$35.2 billion 2021-2023 biennial budget this week. Overall, the proposal calls for a balanced budget and a restored rainy-day fund for the next two years.
  - Notably, the budget seeks to increase K-12 education funding by 2% for fiscal year 2022 and an additional 1% increase in fiscal year 2023, for a total of about \$377 million in new dollars going toward K-12 over the biennium.
  - The proposed budget also includes an additional \$100 million for the Next Level Broadband Grant Program, which the Holcomb Administration established in 2018 with \$100 million in one-time dollars from an increase in toll road fees for heavy vehicles. The program is designed to expand access to high-speed internet to rural areas of the state. To date, more than \$79 million has been awarded for broadband infrastructure that will connect 21,900 homes and commercial locations in 41 counties.
  - In May, Governor Holcomb reduced all state agency budgets by 15% after the steep state revenue declines during the COVID shutdown this spring. Most agency funding has been restored in this budget, but not all.
  - In June, Indiana's public colleges and universities were asked to cut 7% from their respective budgets. That 7% would be restored over the next two years in this proposed budget.
- Legislators have advanced Senate Bill 1, which would provide protections to individuals and businesses from COVID-19 related lawsuits. Specifically, SB 1 would protect individuals, associations, corporations, trusts, limited liability companies, partnerships, political subdivisions, government entities and any other organization from coronavirus civil liability lawsuits unless there was gross negligence or willful misconduct that could be proven with clear and convincing evidence. This is a priority not only of the legislature, but it was also set out in Governor Holcomb's legislative agenda. The Senate Judiciary Committee approved the bill and now the full Senate will take it up. A similar bill, House Bill 1002, is under consideration in the House of Representatives.
- On the utility and energy fronts, several bills have been introduced that we are reviewing and will be watching closely. Legislation addressing electric utility resource adequacy, siting authority for renewable energy facilities, property tax assessment of utility scale solar projects, an extension of the energy policy development task force, broadband, and small cell towers and telecommunications permitting are among many issues to be discussed in the coming weeks. As discussions take place on these and other bills, we will be monitoring and making sure that IMPA and our municipal electric utilities collective interests are protected.
- The House Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications Committee met for the first time this week to consider House Bill 1191, authored by Representative Jim Pressel (R-Laporte). HB 1191 provides that the legislative body of a city or town or a county executive does not prohibit a public utility or department of public utilities from furnishing utility service to a utility customer or a customer of a public utility or department of public utilities from purchasing, using, or connecting or reconnecting to a utility service (primarily natural gas). The committee did not take a vote on this measure as there will be an amendment for action at next week's meeting.
- Next week, the House Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications Committee will meet to vote on House Bill 1191, and to begin consideration of House Bills 1220, 1287, 1385 and 1419. Please see the IMPA Tracking List for bill details. The Senate Utilities Committee is not yet scheduled, but we do anticipate it meeting.