

2021 INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY WEEK 1

- The Indiana General Assembly reconvened on January 4th for the 2021 “long” legislative session. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, things do look a lot different this year. Direct access to legislators is more restricted, with much interaction limited to telephone or other virtual communications. Some of the changes this session include:
 - The House of Representatives has relocated across the street from the State House to the Government Center South Building for the session to accommodate social distancing between legislators, but the room is still a tight fit once everyone is inside and spaced six feet apart. For the foreseeable future, the House is meeting in session only on Thursdays each week in an effort to limit how often all 100 legislators must be in the same room.
 - The 50-member Senate is meeting in the Senate Chamber at the State House. However, 30 Senators are located on the Senate floor while the other 20 Senators are sitting in the balcony which is typically where the general public sits to observe sessions. The Senate is maintaining its typical floor schedule and will meet in session on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at this point with legislative staff working rotating shifts both remotely from home and from the State House to limit exposure and hopefully prevent staff shortages due to quarantining if it becomes necessary. Additionally, plexiglass has been installed in both locations to separate legislators when they are speaking.
 - House and Senate Committees have a limited number of rooms to hold meetings to accommodate social distancing. As a general rule, lobbyists and the general public will be able to testify on legislative proposals separately from legislators in a committee room. This will be done remotely from designated rooms throughout the State House complex (including the Government Center) through video.
 - Face masks also must be worn inside the Statehouse and the Government Center complex by legislative staff, lobbyists and the general public. Legislators, however, have not imposed the face mask requirement on themselves.
- During the “long” regular session, legislators in both the House of Representatives and the Senate have a 10-bill limit. All legislators have been advised to prioritize their legislation due to the potentially fluid nature of the coming weeks. We expect fewer bills to move through the process this session due to time constraints and logistical challenges.
- Introduced legislation is coming out relatively efficiently but so far, we have seen about 470 House and Senate bills, with many more in the process of being made public for review.
- COVID-19 will likely dominate not only the logistics of the session, but also a significant part of the agenda, as well.
 - Bills being given priority this session include Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 1002, both containing provisions that provide civil liability protections from COVID-19 related lawsuits for a wide range of business entities.
 - Additionally, legislators are moving quickly on two bills that are needed to provide full funding to schools that are serving an increasing number of students virtually versus in the classroom during the pandemic. Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 1003 will fully fund virtual students and protect schools from losing state funding, at least through July 2021.
 - Governor Holcomb’s executive powers during an emergency are also going to be discussed this session. Several bills have been introduced that would revise the state’s Emergency Powers Act and allow the legislature more opportunities to provide input on emergency declarations by the Governor. Additionally, there are bills that provide local legislative bodies an appeal process when local health departments take actions in response to a declared disaster emergency.
- Must do items this session include crafting a new two-year \$35 billion state budget and the redistricting of Indiana’s Congressional and state legislative districts. There is a possibility that the delivery of census data for that exercise could be delayed, which could impact the General Assembly’s schedule. The budget must be approved by the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2021.
- As legislation continues to come out, we will be watching all legislation for possible impact on IMPA and our municipal electric utility members. Next week’s update will provide information on legislation specifically related to the energy and utility arena.
- Governor Holcomb and Lt. Governor Crouch will be sworn into their second terms on Monday January 11th, and the Governor’s State of the State (SOS) address, which is given to a joint gathering of the House and Senate members, will take place on Tuesday evening January 19th. Because of the pandemic, the SOS will look different this year. The details have yet to be determined, but it will likely have a virtual component. A joint session of the 150 members of the General Assembly could be challenging logistically. The other annual joint session of the legislature is for the annual State of the Judiciary address, given by Supreme Court Chief Justice Loretta Rush. That address will not take place.