

PROPERTY TAXES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

A heavily amended property tax bill got the green light from the Republicans on the House Ways and Means Committee this week. HF2274 (formerly HSB 519), the Governor's commercial property tax reform proposal, now moves to the floor. It will likely be debated early next week. The new bill attempts to mesh together the ideas from HSB500 and HSB519 into one tax reform proposal. The result of the meeting of the minds between the Governor and key House Republicans is an extremely complex piece of legislation with many moving parts and possible unintended consequences. The bill received an icy reception this week from Senate Democrats, who warn of the legislation forcing a shift of hundreds of millions onto residential taxpayers.

HF2114 was on the agenda for consideration by the House Public Safety Committee last Thursday. The bill would establish complete control of firearms with the State. It would preempt any political subdivision from enacting an ordinance, measure, enactment, rule, resolution, motion, or policy to regulate the ownership, possession, use, discharge, carrying, transportation, registration, transfer, and storage of firearms, firearm accessories, and ammunition except in certain narrowly defined circumstances. The Committee chair convened the Public Safety Committee, announced an amendment to the bill would be considered and both parties went into caucus. The amendment in question would have stripped all of the bill language (known as a "strikeafter amendment") and replaced it with the addition of the word "carrying" to the existing code section preventing local regulation of firearms. After a lengthy caucus the Committee reconvened and immediately adjourned without voting on the amendment or the bill. We will continue to watch to see whether this legislation gains new life or whether it stays stalled in committee.

SF2012, a bill championed by volunteer firefighters, passed out of the Senate State Government Committee on Thursday along party lines, with Democrats supporting the bill and Republicans opposing it. (The Chair of the State Government Committee, Jeff Danielson, is also a firefighter.) This bill authorizes a township providing fire protection services or emergency medical services to collect a service charge, in lieu of or in addition to, the property taxes it is currently authorized to collect. The service charge for fire protection service would be charged to the property owner where the service was provided. The service charge for emergency medical service would be charged to the recipient of the emergency medical service or to the parent of the recipient if the recipient is a minor. Under the bill, the charge could not exceed an amount equal to the actual expense incurred by the township to provide the service. Unpaid service charges for fire protection would become a lien on the property after six months. The township could bring a civil action in order to collect an unpaid service charge for EMS services, six months after the recipient was notified of the service charge.

SF2085 received a lot of media attention this week. The bill which would have required persons under age eighteen to use a helmet when operating a moped never made it out of a Senate subcommittee this week, despite personal, emotional pleas in favor of the bill from young women who were friends with an Iowa City teen who died after a moped accident. The subcommittee members were all sympathetic to the arguments, but unanimously agreed that better training of moped riders would result in fewer personal injury accidents and less infringement of individual rights than a new helmet requirement.

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