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Capitol Watch: Budget Week & Bills to Watch

1 message

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Fri, Feb 20, 2026 at 4:30 PM



Quiet Week at the Capitol - But Not for Long

Hello and Happy Friday!

While the General Assembly technically gaveled in weeks ago, this was the first week lawmakers were scheduled to begin taking meaningful action on legislation. Both chambers were in session, and more than 50 House and Senate committees scheduled to start bill hearings.

On paper, it looked like it was set to be a busy week. In reality, the Governor's budget address dominated nearly every conversation under the dome. Many committee hearings were canceled, and those that did convene often heard only one or two bills. The budget, and the fiscal pressures surrounding it, clearly took center stage.

That said, don't mistake a lighter committee schedule for a slow session. Committee deadlines are quickly approaching, and next week is already shaping up to be far more active. As is often the case, the early weeks can feel quiet - right up until they aren't. We expect the pace to accelerate significantly over the next couple of weeks as sponsors move to advance priority legislation.

While it's far too early to predict which proposals will ultimately gain traction, several bills have been filed that warrant attention. Below is a short list of measures worth keeping on your radar as the session begins to take shape.

General Election Day

SB 3511 (Morrison-D; Deerfield) has been filed and would make General Election day a school holiday every even year. If passed, this measure would provide consistency for schools for the purposes of calendar planning in future years, and it would take effect starting with the scheduled General Election day on November 3, 2026. We will not know for certain if the measure will be enacted until this summer, so school calendars may need to be amended if it is passed this year by the General Assembly. The bill has been

assigned to the Senate Executive committee in the Elections subcommittee, but has not yet been scheduled for a hearing.

Sunset Extensions

HB 4375 (Hoffman; D-Belleville) was scheduled to be heard in the House Elementary and Secondary Education: Administration, Licensing, and Charter Schools Committee on Wednesday. Unfortunately it was one of the many committees canceled this week. The bill is an association initiative that seeks to extend the provision that allows school districts to make transfers among funds for the purposes of covering a one-time non-recurring expense, or to transfer money to the fund in most need. As continued fiscal uncertainty looms, this tool will need to be preserved for financial flexibility. The bill is now scheduled to be heard next Wednesday in committee.

SB 2953 (Halpin; D-Rock Island) would extend the current allowance for retirees to substitute for up to 120 days (or 600 hours) through June 2029. Without an extension, the retiree allowance would revert back to 100 days (or 500 hours). The Association is working with the IEA and other school groups to support this extension. The bill is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Education committee next week.

SB 2950 (Martwick; D-Chicago) would extend the option for an annuitant to receive an accelerated pension benefit payment in lieu of an annuity. Currently, this allowance runs through June 30, 2026, and the proposal would extend the allowance through June 30, 2028. It has an accompanying bond provision to cover the projected cost, and this mirrors the Governor's pension [proposal](#) that was unveiled two weeks ago.

World Language

As you know, the implementation deadline for the requirement that all Illinois students graduate having completed two years of world language coursework is quickly approaching. Since the mandate's enactment, we have consistently raised concerns about statewide teacher shortages in this content area, the potential displacement of CTE, fine arts, and other innovative programming, and most importantly, the impact on a student's ability to personalize their high school experience in alignment with their postsecondary goals.

Our members continue to emphasize that a one-size-fits-all graduation requirement does not reflect the diverse aspirations of Illinois students or the staffing realities facing school districts.

We are actively engaged in discussions with Leader Kimberly Lightford, architect of the 2021 pillar legislation that included this requirement, to advocate for a practical course substitution process that preserves the goal of ensuring every student graduates with the prerequisites to afford them access to their chosen postsecondary pathway, while protecting student choice. At the request of school management groups, the Leader has filed **SB 4055** as a vehicle for these conversations.

We know our members expect a workable solution that acknowledges on-the-ground realities and ensures students are both well-prepared and empowered to pursue the pathway that best fits their future. We remain committed to advancing that outcome this spring and will continue to advocate for flexibility as implementation draws nearer.

What's Next

Both chambers are set to be in session next week, and there are a multitude of bills scheduled to have hearings. As we begin the heart of the legislative session, I would like to thank you in advance for your engagement and commitment to ensuring our voices are heard in Springfield. Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely,

Emily Warnecke
Chief of Staff



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