WHAT’S NEW?
The first week of the 2024 Legislative Session saw plenty of announcements from government leaders and packed committee schedules. In addition, Hoosiers received updates in the form of Governor Eric Holcomb’s final State of the State address and remarks from Indiana Chief Justice Loretta Rush during the annual State of the Judiciary.

As it stands at time of publication, 419 bills have been filed in the House, while the Senate filed 294 bills. The bill filing deadlines in the House and the Senate have both passed, so all the bills should be officially released by early next week. Attention now turns toward the committee report deadlines. Any bill that does not advance out of committee by the deadline is officially considered dead, although language from legislation could still be revived as amendments later in session.

See the remaining legislative deadlines below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House</th>
<th>Senate</th>
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<td>● Jan. 30 – Deadline for House bills to advance out of committee</td>
<td>● Feb. 1 – Deadline for Senate bills to advance out of committee</td>
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<td>● Feb. 1 – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Reading Deadline</td>
<td>● Feb. 5 – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Reading Deadline</td>
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\textit{Required Sine Die Date: March 14}

2024 ELECTIONS
The 2024 Primary Election will be here before we know it. Candidacy filing with the Indiana Secretary of State opened this week and will close on February 9. Primary Election Day will be May 7, 2024.
Congressman Larry Bucshon, M.D. shook things up early this week by announcing his plans to retire at the end of his term. Bucshon currently represents Indiana’s 8th Congressional District, which encompasses all or part of 21 counties in Southern and West Central Indiana. He was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2011.

Congressman Greg Pence followed Bucshon’s lead a day later, revealing his own intention to not file for reelection this year. Pence is currently serving his third term representing Indiana’s 6th Congressional District, which contains all or portions of 11 eastern and central Indiana counties.

State Rep. Mike Speedy (R-Indianapolis), true to his name, quickly became the first to announce his campaign to replace Pence. This will also cause his retirement from the Indiana General Assembly.

State Rep. Denny Zent also joined the growing list of Indiana state legislators not seeking reelection this year. Zent has served in the General Assembly since 2012.

And finally, State Rep. Ryan Hatfield, a Democrat, announced he is running for Vanderburgh County Circuit Court Judge, making 2024 his last session. Hatfield has served seven years in the General Assembly.

Previously announced retirements from the General Assembly include: Rep. Donna Schaibley (R-Zionsville); Rep. Jerry Torr (R-Carmel); Rep. Bob Cherry (R-Greenfield); Rep. Randy Lyness (R-West Harrison); Rep. Chuck Goodrich (R-Noblesville); and Sen. John Crane (R-Avon).

GOVERNOR HOLCOMB’S 2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
Gov. Eric Holcomb kicked off the start of a busy week with unveiling his legislative and administrative goals for 2024.

Holcomb’s 2024 Next Level Agenda was broken down into five categories:

- Education
  - Early Childhood
    - Work to expand the supply and sustainability of childcare and early childhood education providers by better attracting, retaining and training the workforce, empowering employer-sponsored options, and continuing systemic regulatory reforms including:
      - Enhancing the workforce pipeline by including early childhood education credential training in the state’s Workforce Ready Grant and Employer Training Grant programs through administrative measures.
      - Decreasing the minimum caregiver age for infant and toddler rooms from 21 to 18 for specific individuals who have received appropriate training, parental notice, and meet child safety requirements.
      - Lowering the minimum supervised caregiver age for school-age classrooms from 18 to 16 for certain individuals, provided they undergo appropriate training, parental notice, and adhere to child safety requirements.
• Broadening the pool of early childhood educators and addressing workforce needs by permitting qualified individuals from other fields, such as K-12 teachers, to register as 'substitute educators.'

• Supporting ongoing initiatives to improve salaries for early childhood educators by conducting a statewide employee compensation study.

• Initiating the second phase of Governor Holcomb's Employer-Sponsored Child Care Fund by allocating the remaining $6.9 million to assist employers and communities in expanding child care options. (The first $18 million was announced in December 2023.)

• Introducing a new eligibility category for the On My Way Pre-K Program and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers, offering free or reduced-cost child care to employees of licensed child care entities in this critical workforce segment with earnings up to 85 percent of the state’s median income.

• Continuing administrative regulatory reforms aimed at increasing the number of high-quality child care providers by considering recommendations from the Early Learning Advisory Committee. Additionally, allow more K-12 public schools to qualify as eligible providers for the On My Way Pre-K Program.

○ K-12

■ Provide early intervention tools and resources to assist students and educators with reading efforts to reach the stated goal of 95% of third graders reading proficiently by 2027 by:

• Requiring schools to administer IREAD in second grade and to offer summer school reading programs to students in second grade who are not on track for reading proficiency and third graders who did not pass.

• Continuing to test students who have not passed IREAD through sixth grade or until they demonstrate reading proficiency.

• Strengthening retention efforts for students who have not passed IREAD in third grade.

■ Ensure the state’s 2023 promise that a free public education includes free curricular materials is implemented statewide by requiring schools to annually report to IDOE any and all student fees charged to families, regardless of type, and the data will be posted online.

■ Establish a computer science course requirement for high school graduation beginning in 2029 to better equip Hoosier students with the necessary digital skills to enter the mid-twenty-first century workforce.

○ Higher Education

■ Accelerate and increase post-secondary student achievement by:

• Advocating for legislation mandating state universities to assess bachelor's degree programs to determine the viability of offering structured three-year degree programs.

• Proposing that all public four-year institutions carefully evaluate the possibility, campus by campus, of granting earned associate degrees (requiring at least 70 eligible credit hours) to eligible current and former "stopped out" students.

• Establishing a statewide "reverse transfer" system designed to actively identify former community college students who
transferred to a four-year state educational institution and are eligible for an earned associate degree (with at least 60 eligible credit hours) as either a current or former "stopped out" student.

- **Economic and Workforce Development**
  - Continue connecting Hoosiers with the jobs of the future by announcing the creation of the "One Stop to Start" workforce hub that will:
    - Offer real-time support and one-on-one navigation that connects Hoosiers and employers to workforce, education and training programs that meet their needs and sets them up for future success.
    - Promote awareness and access to the state’s workforce education and training programs, including Next Level Jobs and other resources.

- **Community Development**
  - Work with legislators to make it easier for communities to prepare and recover from disasters by:
    - Streamlining how the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) can be used to ensure more expenses associated with disasters are eligible.
    - Allowing a portion of the SDRF to be awarded for disaster mitigation programs to assist in protecting against future damage.
    - Simplifying the public assistance grant formula for easier access when needed.
    - Increasing the maximum potential award for individual assistance from $10,000 to $25,000.
    - Providing Hoosiers flexibility when applying for assistance by removing the requirement that individual assistance can only be used when the United State Small Business Administration declares a disaster.
    - Incentivizing counties to prepare hazard mitigation plans by increasing the amount the county can receive in a disaster.

- **Good Government**
  - Work with the General Assembly to create a task force charged with reviewing bail reform efforts and analyze data to determine how these efforts have impacted public safety including violent crime and recidivism rates.

- **Health**
  - Direct the state's social services agencies to focus on:
    - The Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) will create a Multisector Plan for Aging in collaboration with public, private and independent sectors. The 10-year guide will include solutions that will position the state to best address the current and future needs of its growing aging population across the lifespan, focusing on housing, transportation, employment, income security and health.
    - The governor will also direct continued agency collaboration among FSSA, DOE, the Department of Child Services and the Department of Corrections, as well as external stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive plan to improve support services and treatment options for youth with high acuity needs and their caregivers.

Click [here](#) to review the governor’s agenda presentation and press release.

**HOLCOMB’S FINAL STATE OF THE STATE**
There were few surprises during Gov. Holcomb’s final State of the State Address although he did announce the Lilly Endowment is providing a $250 million donation to address blight and redevelopment around the state in addition to cultivating arts and cultural initiatives. The funds
will be distributed through the READI program, which is already distributing $500 million in economic development grants.

Holcomb also used the opportunity to highlight key points in his 2024 Next Level Agenda like improving third grade reading policies, making college more accessible by creating three-year and associate degree options, growing the state’s beleaguered child care workforce and building awareness of current government services.

STATE OF THE JUDICIARY
In her annual State of the Judiciary address, Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Loretta Rush expressed gratitude to lawmakers for their financial support, highlighting the positive impact on the state’s courts. She emphasized the success of Indiana's 21 family recovery courts, sharing a story of a man named Josh who transformed his life through the recovery court process, thanks to the funding provided. Chief Justice Rush also discussed a rural justice summit focused on improving access to treatment and rehabilitation in under-resourced areas. She acknowledged the role of courts as a primary referral source for treatment and addressed challenges related to disparities in available resources. Additionally, she touched on technology improvements and commercial courts, thanking Gov. Eric Holcomb for his leadership and appointment of 100 trial court judges. Chief Justice Rush assured the governor of a strong judiciary and expressed confidence in the continued support and funding from the state.

REPUBLICANS REVEAL LIMITED PRIORITIES, DEMOCRATS UNITED ON TOP ISSUES
As House and Senate leaders previously mentioned, both Republican caucuses have much sparser legislative agendas this year.

House Republicans chose to stick to five main priorities:

● Expanding Work Based Learning
  ○ House Bill 1001, authored by State Rep. Chuck Goodrich, aims to expand the Frank O'Bannon Grant and 21st Century Scholarship to include job training in addition to traditional college coursework. House leaders said this proposal would allow more students to obtain certificates and certifications, and be better prepared to enter today’s workforce.

● Supporting Jewish Students
  ○ House Bill 1002, authored by State Rep. Chris Jeter, would specify that antisemitism is religious discrimination and is not allowed within the public education system.

● Protecting Taxpayers
  ○ House Bill 1003, authored by State Rep. Greg Steuerwald, is intended to better support taxpayers and business owners who interact with state agencies by creating a more efficient and balanced appeals process that is presided over by administrative law judges.

● Stepping Up for Retirees
  ○ House Bill 1004, authored by State Rep. Bob Cherry, would provide a 13th check to the state’s nearly 100,000 retired public servants like law enforcement and teachers. Existing, dedicated funds would be used to make a one-time payment to retirees.

● Boosting Student Reading Proficiency
  ○ Senate Bill 1, which House lawmakers will be letting the Senate take the lead on, will get a deeper look shortly.

Senate Republicans also broke down their priorities into five main ideas including:
• Improving Hoosier Students’ Reading Skills
  ○ Senate Bill 1, authored by State Sen. Linda Rogers, is aimed at ensuring Hoosier students get the best reading education by providing Science of Reading instruction, committing to early detection and remediation for students not reading at grade level, and as a last resort, retaining those students who are not reading well enough to move on to fourth grade. Nearly 1 in 5 Hoosier third graders lack basic reading skills and ensuring students can read is important to their success later in life.

• Child Care Access and Affordability
  ○ Senate Bill 2, authored by State Sen. Ed Charbonneau, aims to increase the number of child care providers in Indiana by eliminating unnecessary red tape. Increasing child care access and affordability will ensure more Hoosiers who want to enter the workforce can do so while making sure their families are taken care of at the same time.

• Protect Hoosier Patients through Prior Authorization Reform
  ○ Senate Bill 3, authored by State Sen. Tyler Johnson, is an effort to reform the prior authorization system. Senate Republicans argue that prior authorization procedures can cause delays and deny care for patients and they intend Senate Bill 3 to refocus prior authorization on identifying waste, fraud and abuse without negatively impacting patients and doctors.

• Fiscal Responsibility, Government Accountability
  ○ Senate Bill 4, authored by Senate Majority Floor Leader Chris Garten, would set up an ongoing process to review and return unused state government funds to the General Fund and enable state agencies to lower or eliminate fines and fees more quickly.

• Upgrade Lead Pipes to Protect Hoosiers’ Health
  ○ Senate Bill 5, authored by State Sen. Eric Koch would enable utility companies with Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission-approved lead line service replacement plans to replace lead pipes more quickly and in a more cost effective way. There are more than 265,000 lead water lines still in use in Indiana. Since lead pipes are known to cause severe health problems in children and adults, this legislation could help utility companies to replace them quickly, efficiently and at a lower cost.

House and Senate Democrats revealed joint priorities lawmakers intend to focus on this session including:
• Increasing access to affordable, high-quality childcare
• Providing all homeowners with property tax relief via a $250 property tax credit funded by state surplus dollars
• Capping prescription drug costs
  ○ Insulin at $35
  ○ Albuterol at $55 and
  ○ Epinephrine (EpiPens) at $25
• Solving the third-grade reading proficiency crisis through individualized, student-focused and non-punitive interventions
• Allowing citizen-led ballot referendums to take place in Indiana

To review each caucus’s legislative priorities individually, click below:
• House Republicans
• Senate Republicans
• Statehouse Democrats
SENATE OMNIBUS HEALTH CARE BILL draws attention

New legislation seeks to address issues in the dental insurance process. Senate Bill 132, authored by State Sen. Liz Brown, aims to regulate insurers and allow patients to assign benefits to dental providers, even if the dentist is not in-network.

Some dentists argue that the current system results in patients walking out without paying or spending insurance refunds without realizing they are meant for dental care. However, dental insurance providers expressed concerns that allowing Assignment of Benefits (AOBs) would lead to smaller networks, incentivizing dentists to drop out of insurance networks. They also said that AOBs could lead to higher fees charged by dentists, resulting in increased costs for patients.

Sen. Brown pushed back against these concerns, suggesting that insurers should pay dentists directly, even if the payment is reduced for out-of-network providers, and emphasized giving patients more authority and choice in their dental care.

Other portions of the bill include provisions related to the Family and Social Services Administration’s (FSSA) rollout of Managed Care for Long-Term Supports and Services, telehealth law tweaks, easing licensing for foreign-born nurses, and eliminating certain requirements for health facility administrators.

The bill passed the Senate Health and Provider Services Committee and was recommitted to the Senate Appropriations Committee for further consideration of the bill’s fiscal impacts.

READY TO DRINK COCKTAILS LEGISLATION MOVES

The House Public Policy Committee voted to advance House Bill 1025, which would allow beer wholesalers to sell liquor-based ready-to-drink (RTD) cocktails, despite objections from wine and liquor wholesalers.

Proponents argue that the bill is a small tweak to the system, providing operational efficiencies for beer wholesalers.

Opponents, including representatives from the liquor wholesalers, raised concerns about the bill being one-sided and predatory. They highlighted the fact that the bill creates an uneven playing field allowing traditional beer manufacturers to unilaterally move their liquor based products to the beer network without allowing liquor wholesalers to compete for beer products. Similar legislation failed in the Senate committee during the previous session.

The committee approved the legislation with an 8-3 vote, and it is now pending on the House floor for further consideration.

WHAT’S NEXT?

To see what committees are scheduled in the Senate, click here. View the House’s docket here. Visit iga.in.gov to access bills, view the latest session calendars, and watch session live.

Please contact your BPAG Professional with any questions regarding the topics above.

PRIORITY LEGISLATION