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**Legislative study committees wrapping up work as new session convenes**

All but two of the Legislature's study committees have largely wrapped up their work ahead of the new session, with lawmakers poised to introduce legislation ranging from bail and pretrial release to minor guardianships.

Many of the 10 panels formed around issues that were left unresolved last year, including the enforcement of alcohol beverage laws, property tax assessment practices and the use of police body cams.

Overall, the bodies varied in the volume and scope of bill drafts, and for many, the next hurdle is awaiting approval from the Joint Legislative Council to formally introduce the legislation.

But two committees aren't holding their final meetings until the end of January or early February, when members will be able to officially finalize their legislative recommendations.

Members of the Legislative Council Study Committee on Bail and Conditions of Pretrial Release are set to review a number of bills, including a proposed constitutional amendment to let the Legislature authorize circuit courts to deny release of a person accused of a crime prior to conviction.

And the Study Committee on Child Placement and Support has more than a dozen different bill drafts on the table for consideration when it meets Feb. 11. Some of the legislation would reduce child support payments during incarceration, calculate child support obligation, determine the child's best interest when making custody decisions and more.

Meanwhile, the Alcohol Beverages Enforcement Study Committee is among the panels that sought to tackle leftover issues from last session — specifically, the Department of Revenue's interpretation of enforcement and the greater three-tiered system.

Enforcement of the system has regularly surfaced as an issue, including during a last-minute attempt last session to extend the hours wineries can operate. The bill was amended to target so-called "wedding barns," which allow patrons to bring in their own alcohol and unlicensed bartenders. But it was scuttled over concerns it could impact tailgating around Lambeau Field.

Chair Rep. Rob Swearingen told WisPolitics.com it was "a little bit frustrating" the committee wasn't able to get a handle on "the whole scope" of what it was looking to accomplish.

Ultimately, members opted to back legislation on common carriers and out-of-state shippers. Specifically, one bill would compel carriers to report the type and quality of alcohol shipped, as well as the tracking number and manufacturer information. The other seeks to clarify the state's jurisdiction over online alcohol shipments into Wisconsin.

Swearingen, R-Rhinelander, said while he had been anticipating the committee could get "to get to a point where we could actually help (DOR) retool," the change in administration means any work from the panel post-November "was kind of moot."

In a letter to committee members, Swearingen wrote: "Whether addressed through an internal restructuring or future legislation, the work of this committee makes clear that it is dire for Wisconsin to address the problem in the very near future."

Summarizing the work of other committees:

» The Study Committee on Direct Primary Care, which had its final meeting in September, isn't putting forth any bill drafts. Instead, the body is recommending the Group Insurance Board look into incorporating an employer-backed direct primary care program into the state employee health plan.

» The Study Committee on Property Tax Assessment Practices has signed off on three bill drafts. They include bills to ease the process a taxpayer must use to appeal an excessive property tax assessment; alter cost-sharing assistance for property tax assessments; and change practices related to the collection of information for commercial property tax assessments.

The committee's meetings came after lawmakers last session debated legislation to prevent stores from basing their property value on vacant properties or "dark stores," which have lower property value and can be taxed less. Two bills on the issue each failed to clear the Legislature, including a last-ditch effort in the Assembly to amend a bill to include language on the topic.

» Members of the Study Committee on the Use of Police Body Cameras are backing a bill that would require law enforcement agencies using body cams to develop a written policy and training requirements and retain footage for at least 120 days after it's recorded; the draft contains exceptions for longer retention in the case of an individual's death or arrest, among other things.

The language also lays out guidelines for distributing the footage under the state's open records law. It notes footage of a minor, "victim of a sensitive or violent crime" or someone with "a reasonable expectation of privacy" may be pixelated around the subject's face and identifying features to protect him or her.

The language came up, committee vice-chair Rep. Chris Taylor told WisPolitics.com, because members all agreed certain individuals needed special protections under the bill.

"The intent that we all agreed on is there are certain categories of victims that are very sensitive and they do need protection from being disclosed," she said. "And that is victims of sensitive crimes and minors. So we didn't want their identities to be disclosed without consent and without further consideration."

The committee was created after legislation that would have set uniform standards for the retention and release of body camera footage died last session.

Taylor, D-Madison, said the body was able to address "some really critical issues," though she lamented members' inability to find consensus around language outlining when a police camera should be on or off.

Still, she expressed optimism language could be added as the bill's making its way through committee. Or, she said, technology, such as cameras that are automatically activated when a squad car's doors open, may help remedy the issue as well.

» The Study Committee on Minor Guardianships is recommending one bill draft that would create four types of guardianships for a child and set up procedures for emergency guardianships, among other things.

» The Study Committee on the Investment and Use of School Trust Funds has settled on two bill drafts. Members are also recommending the full Legislature study issues on the investment of school trust funds in consultation with any beneficiary groups.

» Members of the Study Committee on the Identification and Management of Dyslexia have approved two bill drafts and three separate recommendations on alternative teacher licensure, lifetime licensure and grade ranges for educator licenses.

» And the Special Committee on State-Tribal Relations is forwarding four different bill drafts to the Joint Legislative Council, including one that would require private schools in a choice program, as well as charter schools, to provide instruction in the "history, culture, and tribal sovereignty" of Native American tribes and bands in the state at least twice during elementary school and once in high school.

Going forward, the Joint Legislative Council will convene to review the panels' recommendations and bill drafts. If a majority of council members support introduction of a bill, that legislation is sponsored by the entire group.

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