



2019 Interim Committees and 2020 Session Opening

There were more interim committees in 2019 than in the past and they recommended lots of bills for the 2020 legislative session that have already been introduced within the first two weeks of the session opening.

Mental health was a specific focus of both the School Safety Committee and the Committee on the Treatment of Persons with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal Justice System. The School Safety Committee recommended legislation dealing with excused absences for behavioral health needs, expanded behavioral health training for K-12 educators, and enhancement of the Safe2Tell hotline. The Treatment of Persons with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal Justice System focused on developing grant programs for supportive housing services to individuals in underserved communities with behavioral, mental health or substance use disorders who have been involved in the criminal justice system. There is also legislation that extends the Committee on Treatment of Persons with Mental Health Disorders in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2023.

The Opioid and Other Substance Use Disorders Study Committee continued their work again this interim and recommended bills focused on five areas: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, recovery, and treatment in the criminal justice system. The harm reduction efforts deal with the provision of naloxone and clean syringes which, given the controversial nature of these strategies, are gaining attention and some criticism. The committee notes that the legislation they have developed over the last few years is proving successful in reducing the number of deaths by overdose, but more work remains as this is still the leading cause of death for those under 55.

Legislation recommended by the Water Resources Review Committee, Wildfire Matters Review Committee and the Zero Waste and Recycling Interim Study Committee focused on the study of emerging technologies for water management, outreach to homeless populations to reduce wildfire risks, and incentivizing the development of recycling end markets, respectively.

Several bills introduced during the early days of the session deal with early childhood programming and supports for the early childhood workforce, based on the work and recommendations of the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission. The Governor also has identified early childhood education as a priority for this session, pushing to expand the Colorado preschool program to meet 50 percent of those eligible (an increase of 6,000 slots). The cost of this expansion is currently estimated to be \$27.6 million. The Governor has also indicated that he intends to push for universal preschool for 4-year-olds by the end of his first term.

The Joint Budget Committee, which meets year-round, received briefings from the executive branch departments during the interim and budget briefings from Legislative Council staff and staff from the Governor's Office of State Planning & Budgeting examining the December Economic & Revenue [Forecast](#). Overall, economic growth is

expected in both Colorado and the U.S. more broadly, but that growth is expected to be slower than in recent years due to an increasingly tight labor market resulting from labor shortages. Revenue subject to TABOR exceeded the Referendum C cap by \$428.3 million, resulting in a TABOR refund in FY 2019-20. The TABOR refund will be paid to taxpayers through a temporary income tax rate reduction for tax year 2019, in addition to fully funding local government reimbursements for property tax exemptions. Budget staff note that fluctuations in the state cash fund levels can dramatically impact how much money is in the general fund. There is still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the revenue projections, which will become more accurate with the March Economic & Revenue Forecast and will inform the General Assembly's decisions as they work to adopt a budget for FY 2020-21.

JBC briefings from Department of State included discussion of a request for \$135,000 by the Secretary of State to support outreach to eligible but unregistered voters. It's believed that there are as many as 400,000 to 900,000 unregistered voters in Colorado who could be participating in elections. Money would be used to send mailings to all these individuals. The Department noted that research has shown that outreach through mail can increase registration by 8 to 12 percent. The Secretary of State believes that outreach will get more voters registered in time for next election. JBC members questioned how this effort might be impacted by the requirements of the automatic voter registration bill that passed during the 2019 session and questioned whether these unregistered voters would be reached through the mandates of that bill (i.e. individuals applying for a driver's license, Medicaid or other types of public assistance). JBC members requested the Department provide more information on this before funding decisions can be made.

Session Opening:

As the 2020 session kicked off on January 8, Democrats and Republicans discussed priorities for their work in the General Assembly. Governor Polis outlined priorities on his State of the State Address on January 9.

Priorities for the Governor include paid family leave (FAMLI), a public option for health insurance, climate change and the need for Colorado to seize the economic benefits associated with building a green economy, creation of bipartisan study committee to review the tax code and recommend revisions, expansion of Colorado preschool program, and transportation investments. Tensions over how to fund transportation infrastructure are an ongoing debate, with Democrats concerned that there is not enough money in the general fund to support the extensive needs throughout Colorado and Republicans believing that existing money is sufficient, but there is a need to reprioritize how it is allocated.

Democrats outlined a wide-range of priorities in their opening addresses including school funding, school safety, addressing the problem of teen suicide, climate change, health care costs, gun safety, death penalty repeal, increasing mental health supports available in Colorado, paid family leave, retirement security, lowering prescription drug costs, and transportation infrastructure, including exploration of local funding solutions and strategies to help support the extensive transportation investments that are needed in Colorado.

Republican priorities outlined at the start of the session include standing up to overreach of state government, providing more school choice to address school performance

problems, addressing problems with teacher pay, pushing back against over- regulation of the oil and gas industry, protection of gun rights, push back against policies put forth by climate alarmists, opposition to safe injection sites, and legislation that addresses improvements to our roads and bridges.