

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

**Friday, February 3, 2006**

*by State Representative David Osborne*

### **General Assembly begins second month of 2006 Session**

With just over a third of the 2006 General Assembly behind us, the first week of February saw several key pieces of legislation deliberated in committee and on the House Floor.

On January 30, I joined fellow House members in unanimously approving the Senate version of HB 283, legislation that provided additional funds for the state Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The Senate doubled the original appropriation of \$5 million and changed the source of funding. The Kentucky Association for Community Action distributes LIHEAP funds to approximately 230,000 families in Kentucky, although current funding provides only about \$125 per family per year, and current funds were projected to be exhausted by early February. The next day, HB 283 became the first bill signed into law by Governor Fletcher this session.

The House also passed HB 321, a measure aimed at making our highway work zones safer for both workers and drivers. House Bill 321 requires the use of a flashing yellow light to indicate a work zone where the fine for speeding is doubled when workers are physically present. However, in order to prevent law-abiding citizens from being unfairly fined, the measure also specifies that double fines in work zones are only applicable when flashing yellow lights are in operation and workers are physically present in the work zone.

The House Banking and Insurance Committee passed a landmark bipartisan measure to help our small businesses provide health insurance to employees. HB 445 would create the Insurance Coverage, Affordability and Relief to (small) Employers, or ICARE, program. Under ICARE, the state would provide incentives to eligible employers who begin providing insurance coverage for their employees. Under HB 445, groups of employers with two to 25 employees would be eligible for ICARE incentives if the employer pays 50 percent or more of the premium cost of employees' health benefit plan and has not provided employer-sponsored coverage to employees within the past 12 months. ICARE would provide vouchers of \$40 per employee per month with an increase to \$60 per employee per month if an employer has an employee with a high-cost condition.

Legislation that would fund full-day kindergarten in all school districts in 2007-08 and allow more low-income children to attend preschool passed the House Education committee this week. House Bill 5 is an \$88 million proposal that would allow more low-income children to attend public preschool and expand full-day kindergarten to every school district. Full funding for low-income children already in public preschool and

increased funding for districts already providing full-day kindergarten would also be appropriated in the bill. During testimony, the bill's sponsor told lawmakers that a recent national study shows that government saves \$2 for every \$1 spent on early childhood education. While HB 5 would not require children to go to kindergarten all day, it would require that all school districts provide the opportunity. It would also provide those districts that can not physically accommodate full-day kindergarten a temporary waiver until they can meet the new requirement.

Also last week I signed on to cosponsor a very important bills that seek to protect the sanctity of human life. I also signed on as a cosponsor to HB 490, legislation titled the "Woman's Right to Know Act" increases the amount of information provided to women considering an abortion so that she can make a more informed decision. Under HB 490, women would receive more information on the possible after-effects of abortion, including the risk of depression, suicide, long-term physical injury to reproductive organs and even the potential for death. Both bills would take Kentucky one step further in protecting the unborn, but I am concerned that House Leadership has not yet assigned this bill to a legislative committee as of my submitting this update. Other bills filed the same day have been assigned and I am hopeful that they will recognize the importance of this issue and the amount of support that this bill has.

With only 37 days left in the 2006 session we still have many important issues to address, including passing the state budget. The budget review subcommittees are currently reviewing the budget, which provides funding for state services for a two year interval. Once they finish their work, the budget will then be sent to the full Appropriations and Revenue Committee and then the full House. After we vote on it, the budget is then sent to the Senate for its consideration.

In the meantime, I will continue to update you on the work of the 2006 General Assembly. as always, I can be reached here at home anytime, or through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. Those with hearing impairments may leave messages for me by calling the TTY message Line at 1-800-896-0305. If you have internet access you can e-mail me at david.osborne@lrc.ky.gov or keep track through the Kentucky Legislature's Home Page:<http://www.lrc.ky.gov>.