

If you have ever responded to a sale or advertisement urging you to “ACT NOW!” then you understand the urgency behind the schedules at the legislature this week. Faced with a March 24 deadline for most committee hearings, legislators dedicated long hours to debates and amendments that allowed their priority bills to move forward before it was too late to be considered this year. More than 100 bills were scheduled in committee hearings this week, and dozens more advanced through floor votes in both the House and Senate.



Of the 1,153 proposals introduced in this legislative session, approximately 650 were not assigned to or heard in the necessary policy committees. More than 240 are still moving through the legislative process. This week, Governor Ducey signed 30 bills into law, including a [simplified renewal of lapsed teaching certifications](#), a mandate that all rape kits be tested within 15 days, and a measure that changes the [citizen initiative process](#). The Governor is still considering more proposals passed by the legislature, including bills to reduce the age at which a restaurant employee can [serve alcohol](#), create a special license plate to raise funding for [science education](#), and put more [inhalers in schools](#).

Senate committees approved a proposal backed by the Arizona Attorney General that would [prevent moving companies](#) from holding a customer’s belongings until they paid for moving services. The full Senate approved a bill to provide more guidance about [dyslexia](#) to schools and families. Through an amendment, a new proposal was introduced and approved to authorize [high-interest loans](#) in Arizona.

A bipartisan coalition approved a measure to [fix roads throughout Arizona](#) by raising vehicle license fees and gas taxes, despite numerous procedural obstacles Republican senators used to try to block the bill from passing. Though supporters of the measure had a temporary victory, Senate President Steve Yarbrough (R-Chandler) announced he will not allow [the proposal](#) to move forward because he opposes increased fees. President Yarbrough also blocked the progress of a bill that would have weakened the “Shannon’s Law” [ban on shooting guns in city limits](#).

In the House, committees advanced a bill to require [additional disclosure](#) on how schools are spending funds generated through the voter-approved Proposition 123 and [voted to keep the State Parks Board](#) despite Governor Ducey’s belief it is no longer necessary. The full House moved closer to [banning background checks](#) on gun sales between private parties and prohibiting [surprise medical bills](#), and approved a bill that protects health care providers who [refuse to participate](#) in a service that results in the death of an individual.

Two other bills that appeared to be dead came back to life this week. [SB 1144](#), a bill to establish a [review of sales tax credits](#), passed the House Committee on Ways & Means after the same committee failed to pass it last week. And a bill to add [tax breaks for Arizona manufacturers](#), which previously failed in the House, was approved and forwarded to the Senate after it was amended to reduce the state cost for the tax credits.

Few committee hearings [are scheduled](#) for next week, and legislators will instead spend their time in floor sessions debating proposals that are moving toward final approval. Behind the scenes, legislative leaders will continue budget talks.

Budget and Healthcare Update

State budget negotiations have begun in earnest, and House Speaker J.D. Mesnard (R-Chandler) [predicts](#) a state budget could be approved by the end of April. In a gathering of House Republicans this week, legislative budget staff provided an [in-depth review](#) of the funding differences between the current state budget and Governor Ducey's funding proposal – a step that Speaker Mesnard said would speed the negotiations on spending priorities.

Skeptics, however, say that progress could be slow due to significant disagreement on several key proposals – like a sweep of state road funds into the Department of Public Safety and resources for university research and building programs.

As they set funding priorities, state leaders are closely monitoring the progress of healthcare changes in Congress. This week, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) – the entity that oversees and administers Arizona's Medicaid programs – released a [sobering estimate](#) of the impact the current federal healthcare proposal could have on state funding and health coverage. Of the 1.9 million low-income Arizonans covered under AHCCCS, the report estimates, almost 400,000 could lose coverage under the bill. More than \$2 billion could be cut from funding for state programs.

As discussion on the Congressional proposal continues in Washington, DC, Governor Ducey remains [concerned](#) about the bill's impacts on Arizona. He told reporters this week that he would continue to seek changes that would prevent “pulling the rug” out from under Arizonans who rely on state Medicaid programs.

Provisional Licensing Proposals Advance

Two proposals designed to expand professional licensures to those convicted of non-violent crimes advanced in the House and the Senate this week. [HB 2290](#) and [SB 1071](#) each authorize a short-term professional license for up to a year, with reporting and oversight requirements for those on community supervision, probation, or other post-conviction measures. Legislators amended both proposals to further strengthen the oversight of individuals working with a provisional license, and to *allow* agencies to issue provisional licenses rather than *require* it.

The bills have inspired bipartisan support throughout the legislative process, as most legislators express support for a path out of crime for those who have served time for a past mistake. Supporters also point to the benefits to those other than the individual, framing employment as a path toward payment of victim compensation fees.

Both bills passed through a final policy committee hearing, and are now eligible to move forward for debate in the House and Senate.

ADA Limits Temporarily Stalled by House Committee

Advocates for people with disabilities scored a major victory this week, when the House Committee on Judiciary & Public Safety failed to pass [SB 1198](#). The bill would require a delay and specified notification before a lawsuit could be filed for an ADA violation – a change that imposed barriers that other groups do not face when enforcing their civil rights.

The Senate passed SB 1198 by a 22-8 vote earlier this month, but it ran into pushback from House members who dedicated more than two hours to testimony and questions for both supporters and opponents of the legislation. Representative Maria Syms (R-Paradise Valley), who had sponsored a similar measure that did *not* include the delayed timeframe for legal action, voted against SB 1198 because it had not come from an inclusive process.

“Everyone is on the same page that there is a problem,” Syms said. “The problem is predatory lawyers. We don’t want to pit the small business community against the disability community.”

Other legislators from both political parties agreed with her, and the bill failed by a vote of 3-6.

The House Committee on Appropriations is scheduled to revive the proposal next Wednesday, however, when it considers an amendment that would add the language of SB 1198 to [SB 1406](#).

Access Aisles Proposal Reaches Governor

Governor Ducey is considering a proposal that would prevent motorists from blocking aisles near accessible parking, after the House approved the measure by a vote of 32-24. Senator John Kavanagh (R-Fountain Hills), the sponsor of [SB 1239](#), said a police officer informed him the change was necessary to protect accessible parking. Some advocates for individuals with disabilities argue that the bill could negatively impact accessibility, since it could be interpreted to limit wheelchair users’ use of the access aisle near their parking.

Senate Committee to Consider One TANF Proposals, Kill Another

Neither the House nor the Senate considered two proposals relating to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits this week, but the Senate Committee on Appropriations is scheduled to consider [HB 2372](#) next week. The controversial proposal would extend the timeline for TANF benefits under multiplied fraud prevention and misuse punishments.

[HB 2091](#), which would remove fingerprinting requirements for TANF recipients, will not be considered. After receiving bipartisan support in the House, the Senate Committee on Appropriations failed to schedule a hearing for the proposal.

On the Bright Side...

Smiling is [good for your health](#).