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Highlights of the Week

The week kicked off with the finalization of the FY 2015-16 budget by the Joint Budget Committee. When the JBC came to work on Monday, they were notified that they had voted for funding \$124.5 million above available revenue. The JBC spent their afternoon reducing the increases they had previously voted for, including a \$50 million decrease in the placeholder for the K-12 School Finance Act (from \$75M to \$25M), a decrease of \$10.6 million in services for the Intellectual and Developmentally Disabled community, and a \$2.5 million reduction in the film incentive program. The JBC also decided to shift payment for continuous eligibility for children in Medicaid to the Hospital Provider Fee in the coming budget year. Shifting this expense to the Hospital Provider Fee will save the state General Fund \$21 million. The budget was introduced in the Senate on Friday and will be heard in Appropriations on Monday. The Senate will debate the budget on second reading on Wednesday and take a final vote on Thursday. The budget is scheduled to be debated in the House the week of April 6th.

To clear their calendars for the budget, the Senate took up many high profile issues for debate on the floor this week. For over two hours the Senate debated the legality of tax credits for non-public education, SB 045. Opponents called it a back door to vouchers and proponents countered that the bill would only increase choice for students and families. Various amendments were offered including allowing the tax credit to go into effect when public education is fully funded or allow the tax credit to go into effect when certain special programs are funded. The amendments failed and the bill eventually passed down partisan lines, though it's expected to meet a swift death in the House. The Senate also took up another gun control repeal bill, SB 086, which removes background check requirements passed in 2013. The bill passed down partisan lines after hours of debate. SB 086 also is unlikely to pass the House. The Senate Judiciary Committee gave initial approval to three bipartisan bills to improve police data collection, transparency, and practices. SB 217, Police Data Collection; SB 218, Disclose Misrepresentation by Peace Officers; and SB 219, Peace Office Shootings Transparency Measures all passed unanimously with little testimony and support of the County Sheriffs of Colorado and the Colorado District Attorney's Council. The House State Veterans and Military

Affairs Committee heard two measures related to minimum wage on Monday. Both bills were moved forward by the committee but the votes were split along partisan lines. The Senate State Affairs Committee killed Senator Kerr's HB 1221, which would have required employers to give parents unpaid parental leave to attend their child's school activities. The business community spoke in opposition to the bill in the hearing and it died on a party line vote. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee also killed a bill Wednesday to eliminate the marijuana edibles working group which was charged with developing labeling and packaging requirements for marijuana edibles. Child advocacy constituencies such as The Kempe Foundation, Children's Hospital Colorado, and Smart Colorado were opposed to the bill because they felt that if SB 136 passed, marijuana edibles would never be required to be marked. Proponents argued that the working group couldn't come to consensus so it made no sense to keep it in place. The bill died by unanimous vote. With only a little more than six weeks remaining in session, more than a dozen bills were introduced this week including the bipartisan "Pay for Success" legislation, HB 1317. We are still waiting on other high profile bills to be introduced, including the annual School Finance Act.

Bills of the Week

Statewide Initiative Process HB 1057 by Representative Court and Minority Leader DelGrosso will require Legislative Council to prepare fiscal impact statements for all measures submitted to the title board. The bill prompted robust discussion in the House State Affairs Committee. A diversity of organizations testified in for and against. Those in support of the bill included the Colorado Children's Campaign, Colorado Concern, the Colorado Petroleum Association and the Colorado Farm Bureau. Those in opposition include the Colorado Education Association, Conservation Colorado, the Independence Institute and AFL/CIO. The House State Affairs committee did not vote on the bill but laid it over for action.

Business Opportunity Study HB 1306, the Business Opportunity Study, was introduced in the House. This is the third time Representative Williams has introduced legislation directing the Department of Personnel to contract for a disparity study of procurement processes in Colorado and make recommendations to ameliorate any discrepancies identified by the study. For the last two years, despite no formal opposition, the bill was unable to pass the Senate. The bill was assigned to the House Business Affairs and Labor Committee. HB 1306 has bipartisan sponsorship in the Senate with Senator Crowder as a co-prime on the bill.

Parent Opt-Out The Senate Education committee heard SB 223 in committee on Thursday. The bill requires that a school district, a board of cooperative services or a charter school allow a parent to excuse his or her child from participating in a standardized assessment that is required by the state or by the local education provider. Each local education provider must adopt a written policy that a parent may follow to excuse his or her student from taking the standardized assessment. Opponents argued that passage of the bill would jeopardize \$350 million in federal funds for Colorado school districts and result in consequences to the accountability system. After a lengthy debate on amendments and much disagreement about the actual scope and consequences of the bill, it passed 8-1.

Exclusive Charter Authority SB 216 would remove a school districts exclusive chartering authority if they are in priority improvement or turn around status for three consecutive years. School districts would still be able to authorize but the Charter School Institute would also have the ability to authorize in those certain districts unless the district has an MOU with CSI. The Colorado Association of School Boards and the Colorado Association of School Executives both testified in opposition of the bill because they felt it eroded local control. The League of Charter Schools, the Charter School Institute, Colorado Succeeds, Colorado Children’s Campaign, and several parents testified in support of the bill because it will open choices for students in districts with little choice. Nine amendments were offered and all but one were rejected. SB 216 passed Senate Education 6-3.

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