

Insights

Take Five: 5 Things You Need to Know About Indiana Government

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1. Governor's Public Health Commission

On Wednesday, August 18th, Governor Holcomb announced the creation of the Governor's Public Health Commission through **Executive Order 21-21**. The 15-member Commission will be co-chaired by Dr. Judy Monroe, current President and CEO of the CDC Foundation and former Indiana Health Commissioner from 2005-2010, and former state Senator Luke Kenley.

The charge of the Commission is to:

- Analyze Indiana's current public health system to identify strengths and weaknesses;
- Analyze the performance of state and local health departments during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Research and identify the following:
 - Ways to improve the delivery of public health services around the state;
 - Funding challenges and potential solutions;
 - Ways to promote health equity;
 - Ways to ensure local health department sustainability; and
 - Ways to improve the state's response to future public health emergencies.

The Commission will meet approximately monthly over the next year with a goal of packaging legislative proposals into a final report for submission to the legislature by December 31, 2022 in preparation for the 2023 budget session of the Indiana General Assembly. The formation of the Commission was foreshadowed in Gov. Holcomb's 2021 Next Level Agenda, which was released in December of 2020 and called for a "comprehensive assessment of local health departments and state delivery of public health services" using the knowledge and experience gained from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Redistricting

The census data needed to draw new Congressional and legislative maps has now been received by state officials, clearing the way for the Indiana General Assembly to complete the once-a-decade redistricting process.

Legislators heard from hundreds of concerned citizens across a series of nine redistricting hearings that were scheduled throughout the state this month, with many attendees arguing for a more fair process that leads to competitive maps. As of now, the General Assembly still plans to reconvene in late September to consider and ultimately adopt the new districts.

3. COVID-19 Update

On Monday, August 23rd, the US Food and Drug Administration gave full approval to a COVID-19 vaccine for the first time. This approval comes as the Delta variant continues to spread nationwide, with Indiana experiencing case counts and positivity rates similar to those seen in January of 2021. Indiana's current 7 day positivity rate is 10.8%, and as of this week, Indiana has vaccinated 52.3% of Hoosiers age 12 and older based on data from the Indiana Department of Health. The current public health emergency order expires at 11:59pm on August 30th.

4. Federal Update

Earlier this week, Speaker Pelosi called the members of the US House of Representatives back to Washington DC during their August recess to debate and vote on proposals for President Biden's Infrastructure bill, voting rights, and a \$3.5 trillion budget framework. Speaker Pelosi had to negotiate with nine moderate Democrats to gain the needed votes. Late in the afternoon on Tuesday the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4), Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684), and the adoption of the concurrent budget resolution (S. Con. Res. 14) were passed in a combined **vote** and the budget framework now heads to House committees for debate through the budget reconciliation process, which leadership hopes to pass by October 1, 2021.

5. Lawmakers Studying Energy, Wastewater Issues

State legislators began examining a variety of issues that will impact Hoosiers' utility bills. The 21st Century Energy Policy Development Task Force and the Wastewater Infrastructure Investment and Service to Underserved Areas Task Force recently held their first meetings of the year, hearing from the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, and other key agencies and interest groups. The wastewater task force will primarily focus on how to improve service in more rural areas of the state, while the energy task force will discuss issues including electric vehicles and renewable resource standards. Both committees will likely issue recommendations for legislation during the 2022 session and beyond.

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