



HALFTIME AT THE LEGISLATURE

The first set of deadlines have passed for the Indiana Legislature and we have now come to the halftime point. Third Reading deadline was Monday February 22nd in the House and Tuesday February 23rd in the Senate. If bills were not on the calendar by then, it's likely that they are dead. While the bill number itself is no longer alive, that doesn't restrict legislators from including any legislative language from those bills in legislation that is still moving through the process.

During the last week of committee meetings during the first half, CAC attended meetings of the Senate and House Utilities Committees and the Senate Appropriations Committee. In addition, we monitored other committee hearings and marked the progression of legislation we're watching on floors of the House and Senate. During House budget discussions, we saw efforts to improve CHOICE funding in the State Budget unfortunately fail. Both Rep. Greg Porter (D-Indianapolis) and Rep. Robin Shackleford (D-Indianapolis) tried to reinstate funding for [CHOICE Home Care](#) that was slashed by Governor Holcomb. CHOICE is a state-funded program that allows people who require just a few hours of care each day to remain in their homes with part time assistance, rather than being forced prematurely into round-the-clock nursing facilities. [CHOICE Home Care costs Hoosier taxpayers only 4% of what nursing homes cost](#). As we've updated you before, [the Governor's budget proposes to cut CHOICE nearly \\$5,000,000 in each of the next two years](#). As of December 31, 2020, there is a statewide waiting list of nearly 2,000 people which has been increasing with state cutbacks due to COVID-19. This proposed cut to CHOICE funding will increase the number of people on the waiting list by 2,000 in the first year, and by another 2,000 in the second year. We will continue watching this appropriation as budget discussions continue.

LEGISLATION WE'RE FOLLOWING

It was a rather difficult end to the first half in the House, with racial tensions at an all-time high. Legislators booed Black members of the House while on the floor—suggesting systemic racism is alive and well in the Indiana Legislature. This is not new in the halls of the Statehouse where we've routinely seen legislation offered by the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus that would help lift-up traditionally marginalized and left-behind communities ignored or voted down.

The Indiana Legislative Black Caucus [has since called for racism training](#) in an effort to continue the dialogue and pass legislation that breaks down the decades of systemic societal racism. More commentary from the *Indianapolis Recorder*, [here](#).

We would also note that during the first half of the legislative session, the House Environmental Committee did not meet once. This left a large swath of consumer and environmental-friendly legislation on the cutting room floor. Indiana has routinely been rated as one of the worst states in the nation for water and air quality so the refusal of the House Environmental Committee to hold any meetings is particularly bad. Read more, from the *Indy Star* [here](#).

In House Utilities [HB 1164](#), a giant telecom wish list governing 5G infrastructure that changes Indiana code despite pending litigation, a commonly viewed legislative no-no, [passed despite concerns expressed from the committee](#) and then passed the full House despite further concerns, [54-39](#) with bipartisan opposition.

House Bill 1381 [moved out of the House with bipartisan opposition, 58-38](#). The [Governor spoke about the bill](#) during his weekly COVID update, saying "we want to make sure that that local farmer who's trying to maximize their acreage and also keep in mind their neighbors has the ability to do that, while, at the same time, making sure that we're a great state for continuing to not just make and ship but create products that are moved all over the world." While CAC is neutral on the bill, we will continue watching it, [as many county officials](#) are as well.

Senate Utilities discussed SB 349, which seeks to clarify the local government public process for investor-owned water, wastewater and electric utilities in purchasing municipally owned systems. Unfortunately [an amendment brought by Indiana American Water](#) earned our disapproval. While we recognize the incredible need to support water and wastewater infrastructure improvements, the amendment to SB 349, that authorizes a 5% rate increase above and beyond standing rate increases water and wastewater customers are already facing contributes to the affordability crisis and doesn't solve the problem Indiana ratepayers are facing. [Despite our concerns the bill advanced 9-1](#) and then [passed the Senate](#).

The Senate Appropriations Committee voted on [SB 141](#) which situates transit projects for failure by changing requirements. The bill initially FAILED due to a tie. The chairman of the committee then solicited members to change their vote, and Sen Phil Boots complied. [It passed committee by a 7-5](#) vote and then passed the full Senate with bipartisan opposition [38-17](#) after more than an hour of debate. This bill sets Indiana in a race to the bottom and situates those in poverty to remain in poverty. Practically every stakeholder in the Statehouse agrees: [we can do better](#). Tell your state senator to vote no by calling 1-800-382-9467. Read more from the *Statehouse File* [here](#).

