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# Missouri State Representative Steve Jordan's Capitol Report - February 14, 2025

FEBRUARY 14TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

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## Greetings Friends of the 151<sup>st</sup> District!

Things are starting to pick up here in Jefferson City. Bills are moving through committee, and we are able to vote on them on the house floor.

Five weeks into the 2025 legislative session, the Missouri House of Representatives has passed its first set of bills, focusing on key reforms to improve business conditions, protect individual freedoms, and enhance public services across the state. I am excited to share that I have voted for HBs 737 & 486, 594 & 508, 595 & 343, and 75.

Among the legislation passed, HB 737 & 486 ensures foster children retain their rightful benefits and introduces important child welfare reforms. HB 594 & 508 seeks to eliminate the state income tax on capital gains, aiming to boost economic growth. HB 595 & 343 limits local government regulations on landlords, preserving property rights. Meanwhile, HB 75, the 'Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act,' reinforces protections for religious gatherings, preventing undue government interference. With these measures now heading to the Senate, lawmakers continue to push forward on critical issues affecting Missourians statewide.

## House Passes Legislation to Address Child Welfare Issues

The Missouri House has passed out its first bill this session, making good on the promise of Speaker Jon Patterson, who said on the first day of the legislative session that legislation dealing with our state's child welfare system would be the first bill passed out

of the House and sent to the Senate.

[\*\*HB 737 & 486\*\*](#) addresses several key issues related to children in the custody of the Children's Division. The bill introduces changes to how benefits are managed for children in state custody, emphasizes consideration of religious faith in placement decisions, and clarifies circumstances under which children may engage in independent activities.

Currently, an estimated 1,200 young people in Missouri's foster care system are eligible for benefits from the Social Security or Veterans Administrations, or railroad retirement benefits, often because they are the survivors of deceased parents or because they have disabilities. The state Children's Division takes those benefits to cover the costs of caring for those children. Social Security benefits, alone, can be around \$900 or more each month.

Several lawmakers expressed shock that this practice exists, calling it a misuse of funds meant to support foster children. Bipartisan support for the bill was strong, with lawmakers and advocates condemning the current practice of seizing benefits as harmful to vulnerable children. This bill would end Missouri's practice of seizing those benefits from foster children to offset state care costs, ensuring these funds are used for the children's unmet needs or future independence.

The bill includes two other provisions:

One would specify that the offense of abuse or neglect of a child does not include letting a child do things like going to school or nearby locations on foot or by bicycle; play outside; or stay at home for a reasonable amount of time without supervision. Any such "independent activities" must be deemed appropriate for the child's age, maturity, and physical and mental abilities.

The other would require the Children's Division to attempt to place a child in its care with a person, agency, or institution governed by persons of the same religious faith as that of at least one of the child's parents. Missouri Courts must already do so. The bill would require that the Division follow the same procedure.

After passing with a vote of 149-1 in the House, the bill now heads to the Missouri Senate for further consideration. Advocates hope that the passage of this legislation will bring Missouri in line with other states that have already ended the practice of seizing foster children's benefits.

## **House Signs Off on Proposal to Eliminate the State Income Tax**

The Missouri House advanced [\*\*HB 594 & 508\*\*](#) this week, a bill that would grant a full income tax deduction for federal capital gains starting in 2025. Under the proposal,

taxpayers could deduct 100% of capital gains reported on their federal tax returns for state income tax purposes.

Republican legislators have highlighted cutting taxes as a top priority for the 2025 legislative session and are committed to ensuring Missourians keep more of their income. Supporters argue the measure will boost economic growth, create more high-paying jobs for residents, attract more businesses, and make Missouri more competitive with neighboring states by encouraging reinvestment and productivity. They also claim it benefits a broad range of Missourians, including retirees.

However, opponents warn that eliminating capital gains taxes would create a budget shortfall with no mechanism to replace lost revenue, potentially harming funding for essential public services.

With a House vote of 100-48, the bill now moves to the Missouri Senate for further consideration.

### **House Passes Bill Protecting Religious Gatherings from Government Restrictions**

[\*\*HB 75\*\*](#), known as the "Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act," passed out of the Missouri House this week. The bill ensures that religious groups and places of worship can hold services or meetings without government interference. It prohibits public officials from issuing orders that would limit or ban such gatherings, with exceptions only in cases of imminent danger, such as natural disasters or hazardous material incidents. The bill also clarifies that religious groups using places of worship to plan or commit violence are not protected, and places of worship must still comply with building and fire codes.

Supporters of the bill argue that religious freedoms were unjustly restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic when some states allowed other businesses, like casinos, to remain open while limiting church gatherings. They believe the bill adds an essential layer of protection for religious practitioners, particularly for mental health reasons linked to regular church attendance.

Opponents contend that the bill could go too far by limiting the ability of public officials to protect their communities during emergencies. They also claim that the bill's language could unintentionally restrict the practice of religion, the very thing it aims to protect.

With a vote of 106-38 in the House, the bill now heads to the Missouri Senate for further debate.

### **House Passes Bill Limiting Local Regulations on Landlords**

The Missouri House passed [HB 595 & 343](#) this week, a bill restricting local governments from imposing certain regulations on landlords. The legislation prohibits cities and counties from requiring landlords to accept Section 8 housing vouchers, limiting how they screen tenants, capping security deposits, or mandating a tenant’s right of first refusal on a rental property. However, it does allow voluntary agreements between local governments and landlords to regulate rent for subsidized housing.

Supporters argue the bill protects landlords’ rights and prevents measures like Kansas City's ordinance, which forces landlords to accept housing vouchers. They claim it maintains the status quo, supports small landlords, and expands rental opportunities.

Opponents counter that the bill undermines efforts to address affordable housing challenges by making it harder for voucher holders and low-income families to secure housing. They point to Kansas City’s \$1 million risk and mitigation fund designed to offset potential losses for landlords participating in the voucher program.

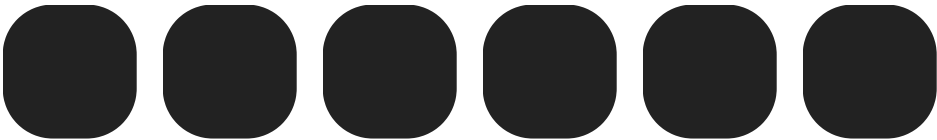
The bill now heads to the Missouri Senate for further consideration.

**If any of you want details on legislation we pass, please email me a request to [Steve.Jordan@house.mo.gov](mailto:Steve.Jordan@house.mo.gov). If you ever have, any questions or concerns feel free to call me at 573-751-1494.**

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