

SAMLN19 Legislative Update 20 4-24-19 5:30 pm

Hi SAMLN19 Members!

This morning the [SB 352](#) Conference Committee met to take action on about 10 amendments to this massive bill. Preschool amendment offered was [SB0352 98.apm](#) and discussed by the Committee following presentation of the content of the amendment by Legislative Services education bill drafter Pad McCracken. A [graphic](#) of the amendment was presented by Pad. This amendment is better than what was described in Update 19 yesterday, but the graphic representation clearly shows that passage would put privatization with public funds into Montana code, create a department of early childhood, and divert state funding directly to private preschools. Conference Committee chair, Sen Thomas, allowed public input (unusual for a Conference Committee) and there were no proponents; opponent testimony came from Dennis Parman (MREA), Kirk Miller (SAM), and Eric Feaver (MFPE). In the SAM testimony, I reported that an amendment had been drafted that would create preschool programming across the state without directing state funds directly to private schools, allowing local school districts to create charter preschool programs with private entities in their own community, not establishing a new department (unnecessarily expanding bureaucracy), and focusing the same funding (\$17 million) to equitably create preschool all across the state -- but that amendment was not given consideration. I emphasized that the solution has been presented but not accepted. This amendment in front of the committee continued to be much more about privatization with public funds than it is about starting preschool or making voluntary preschool available for all Montana children. I requested that the Conference Committee not pass [SB0352 98.apm](#).

Motion by Sen Sesso to adopt amendment [SB0352 98.apm](#). Rep Lynch spoke in support of the amendment. Sen Sesso described the difficulty of getting this started and that this amendment is the best they could do for the now. Vote: 2-4 - failed with Sen Thomas, Rep Glimm, Rep Balance, Sen Osmundson voting No.

Sen Sesso requests adopting an amendment to support Stars Preschool Grants and Federal Preschool Grants be considered for the next 3 years. An amendment will be written and considered later today. The committee recessed until 12:00 noon. At noon, chair Thomas reported that more time would be needed to consider the impact of amendments, and extended the Conference Committee recess until 2:00 pm. At 2:30 pm the Conference Committee on HB 715 convened and adopted a couple of amendments, but the SB 352 Conference Committee did not meet. As the afternoon progressed, the Senate floor session adjourned at about 5:00 pm with no indication of the reconvening of the SB 352 Conference Committee. We learned later from Sen Thomas that the Conference Committee will reconvene tomorrow sometime, following the Senate floor session scheduled for 9:00 am.

The [Stars Preschool Grants and Federal Preschool Grants amendment](#) has an \$11 million appropriation for the biennium. At a little after 5:00 pm, we became aware of another preschool amendment ([SB0352 55-apm](#)) that, upon first look, eliminates the department of early childhood (DEC) and places the Department of Health and Human Services and the Director of that department in charge of using public funds to support private preschool programs. A deep review of this amendment will take place tonight and this may very well be considered by the SB 352 Conference Committee tomorrow (April 25).

This is what I know at this point – about 5:30 pm on April 24. I will prepare SAMLN19 Legislative Update 21 to keep you informed of what could possibly be the final day of the session.

Thanks for your great work yesterday on the Call to Action, and for your effort to track the final days of the session so we don't end up walking away having had bad policy imposed on our schools!

Kirk