

04/17/2018

Greetings Fabulous Fortieth District,

House Republicans Pass 'Tennessee Together' Plan To Help Combat Opioid Epidemic

While the federal government has only just commenced conversation about the opioid epidemic, Tennessee leads the way in fighting the situation here at home. This week, House Republicans passed legislation to combat the state's opioid problem head-on: Tennessee Together.

Tennessee Together is a multi-faceted plan comprised of legislation, \$30 million in funds through the proposed 2018-2019 budget, and other executive actions to battle opioids through the three major components of prevention, treatment, and law enforcement. The plan incorporates recommendations made by Speaker Beth Harwell's Ad Hoc Task Force on Opioid Abuse.

In 2016, there were over 1,600 opioid-related overdose deaths, one of the highest in the nation, and statistics show the numbers are only increasing. Each day in Tennessee, at least three people die from opioid-related overdoses — more than the daily number of traffic fatalities.

Legislative solutions included in Tennessee Together include limiting the supply and dosage of opioid prescriptions, with reasonable exception and an emphasis on new patients, as well as education for elementary and secondary schools through revisions to the state's health education academic standards.

Additionally, the plan invests more than \$25 million for treatment and recovery services for individuals with opioid use disorder. These services will include an increase in peer recovery specialists in targeted, high-need emergency departments to connect patients to treatment immediately.

Tennessee Together increases state funding to attack the illicit sale and trafficking of opioids through additional law enforcement agencies and training, and includes updates to the controlled substance schedules in order to better track, monitor, and penalize the use and unlawful distribution of dangerous and addictive drugs — including fentanyl. Finally, the plan provides every Tennessee state trooper with naloxone for the emergency treatment of opioid overdose prior to paramedic arrival.

House Republicans are dedicated to working closely with the Governor to address Tennessee's opioid problem. While the Tennessee Together plan is a huge step in the right direction, expect additional time and resources to be spent on the opioid front in the coming days.

Advocates Applaud Passage Of New Adoption Legislation

House lawmakers joined together this week for the unanimous passage of House Bill 1856. The bill streamlines the adoption process in Tennessee, adding updates to the law desperately needed to serve children and families across the state better, advocates say.

House Bill 1856 simplifies the surrender form — which was previously very complicated — and updates the language to reflect what the courts have ruled on the issue.

The bill also clarifies parental abandonment, makes the law consistent with U.S. Supreme Court cases on absentee fathers and protects biological fathers attempting to assert parental rights. It eliminates the six-month prior residency requirement for adoption petitioners and expands the opportunity for active duty military personnel to use Tennessee as their legal state of residence to adopt children here.

The bill makes big changes to current law, but most importantly, it streamlines the process and makes it easier to understand. This is important for children in Tennessee because it allows them to be in a more stable environment in a much timelier manner.

Having passed the House, the bill now awaits passage in the Senate. For more information on the legislation, [click here](#).

Tennessee Stolen Valor Act Passes In General Assembly

Legislation increases penalties against those who impersonate military heroes

Wednesday morning, House members unanimously passed a measure to strengthen identity protections for our military veterans.

House Bill 2130, also known as the Tennessee Stolen Valor Act, is designed to safeguard the identities of Tennessee veterans who serve the state and nation by cracking down on instances of theft and fraud involving those who attempt to imitate them.

The measure creates a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to 11 months and 29 days in jail, as well as a fine of up to \$2,500, for anyone who impersonates a veteran or individuals who fraudulently represent their service with the intent of obtaining money, property, services, or any other tangible benefits.

The legislation comes after a recent case in Northeast Tennessee involving a con artist who lied about his military service to steal from

veterans. The initiative is the latest in a series of Republican-led measures designed to honor Tennessee veterans and their service.

Over 10,000 Adults Have Applied For Tennessee Reconnect Scholarship

Application opened in February; Adults can continue to apply at www.TNReconnect.gov

This week, House Republicans joined with Governor Haslam to announce that over 10,000 adults have applied for Tennessee Reconnect, the state's program for adult learners to earn an associate degree or technical certificate tuition-free.

The application for Tennessee Reconnect opened on February 15 of this year and 10,497 applications had been submitted as of April 10. Tennessee Reconnect is a groundbreaking program that covers tuition and mandatory fees at a Tennessee community or technical college for eligible adults that do not yet have a college degree.

Among those who have applied for the scholarship, more than two-thirds have previously enrolled in college and just more than half of all applicants have attended college in the past five years. The average age of applicants is 34 years old and nearly 90 percent of those who applied plan to work while enrolled through Reconnect.

The Tennessee Reconnect program was passed by the General Assembly in 2017. Adults hoping to enroll in community or technical college in fall 2018 are encouraged to apply by April 15 to ensure time to complete all enrollment steps. The application for Reconnect requires four simple steps:

Complete the application at TNReconnect.gov

Apply to a local community college or eligible Tennessee Reconnect institution,

File the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) at FAFSA.ed.gov,

And enroll in a degree or certificate program at least part-time.

The Tennessee Reconnect program is part of the broader Drive to 55 initiative — the push to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or certificate to 55 percent by 2025. Studies show that by 2025, at least half the jobs in Tennessee will require a college degree or certificate.

Tennessee is the first state in the nation to offer all citizens, both high school graduates and adults, the chance to earn a postsecondary degree or certificate tuition-free.

Initiative Promoting High Paying Jobs In Tennessee Passes

House Republicans passed a measure that promotes high paying jobs in Tennessee this week on the House floor.

House Bill 1917 continues the Go Build Tennessee Program through 2024 in order to raise awareness about an abundance of high paying jobs available in communities across the state. The measure strengthens existing partnerships so that students who are interested in the trade industry can utilize Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) campuses to learn the skills they need in order to pursue these high paying careers.

The Go Build Tennessee program was created with the passage of the Go Build Tennessee Act in 2015. It established a nonprofit corporation and board to run the program funded by \$3 million collected by the state in surplus licensing fees.

Since Go Build Tennessee began, 74 percent of students in our state said they were more likely to pursue a career in the trades after hearing the program's message.

Construction and trade jobs are some of the highest paying in Tennessee with an average salary well above median household incomes in most communities. The overall goal of this initiative is to address a shortage of qualified applicants for current vacancies.

Because He Lives,
Terri Lynn Weaver