

MOVING MISSOURI FORWARD

Five Policies to Restart Missouri



Make interstate licensing reciprocity permanent

As the coronavirus pandemic accelerated, Governor Parson was right to waive Missouri's relicensing requirements for doctors licensed in other states. This decision was consistent with legislation passed just days before the legislative session was suspended, which gave similar reciprocity rights to military spouses—and it is entirely consistent with still-pending legislation that would provide license reciprocity rights to all. Having acted to facilitate interstate licensing twice in the past month, the legislature and the governor should make those reforms permanent for all workers. If they do, the third time will truly be the charm.

Make governments receiving “stimulus” publish their spending

The state of Missouri has stepped up its efforts to publish government spending records in an easily understandable format. The product of this work is the Show-Me Checkbook, and in recent weeks the process of adding counties to its database has begun. But legislators can go further by including municipal spending in these transparency efforts. Moreover, Missouri should require local governments seeking “stimulus money” to follow basic fiscal transparency practices, including regular publication of their checkbooks, as a condition of participation in the program. If local governments can spend your money, you should know how they spent it.

Offer emergency education scholarship accounts

Many students in Missouri are receiving little or no education during this crisis and face the threat of losing one-third of a school year's worth of education. In some cases their schools were caught unprepared and haven't yet assembled a curriculum for home-based learning; in others, households lack the resources to access online material. Missouri can help by providing public education dollars to affected families as emergency education scholarship accounts (ESAs). Parents could receive the funding on a debit card or in an online account and then buy materials for home-based learning, computers and software, or internet access. The money could also cover tuition for a public or private online learning course, tutoring, or services for students with disabilities.

Allow school calendar flexibility

In the 2020–21 school year, and perhaps for several thereafter, districts will need to make up for education time lost to the pandemic. Unfortunately, Missouri school districts face unnecessary restrictions that dictate the start date and duration of their school year and impose attendance requirements. While attendance requirements can be waived, the start-date restriction was recently written into law. The legislature should immediately eliminate school calendar restrictions so that districts have the flexibility to start the school year early, add time onto the school day, or extend the school year next spring. Such flexibility can also serve districts in other situations like snow days, natural disasters, or other unexpected events.

Establish a joint committee to address Missouri's revenue shortfall

Missouri's General Revenue collections may decline by up to 30 percent over the next year. Such a shortfall would have far-reaching implications for Missouri, and balancing the state budget will require urgent action. Members from both legislative bodies must begin exploring every option available to address the shortfall while weighing the impact of those changes in a publicly transparent manner. The discussion must include a careful examination and articulation of budget priorities and the reforms needed to maximize the return on government expenditures. Deliberation on the topic should begin immediately to ensure there is adequate time to make the recommended legislative and regulatory changes.