



## State Representative Rep Ron Copeland District 120

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### **Task Force resumes look at Missouri's response to substance abuse**

The Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention Task Force in Missouri has resumed its efforts to address the state's substance abuse challenges. During their recent meeting, the Task Force reviewed past recommendations that had been partially implemented, while revisiting previously identified issues, discussing the refining of strategies, and exploring new challenges in the field of substance abuse.

Dr. Angeline Stanislaus, Chief Medical Director of Missouri's Department of Mental Health, discussed recent advancements in understanding addiction's neurobiology. She highlighted that outdated beliefs about addiction from past decades have evolved due to newer research showing that neurological changes persist long after substance use ends.

The Task Force also emphasized the complex relationship between substance abuse and mental health, citing childhood trauma and violence as factors that can alter brain chemistry and contribute to addiction. Despite the brain's neuroplasticity, which allows for healing, it is recognized that the brain may never fully revert to its original state after substance abuse.

Former Missouri House Speaker Todd Richardson, the current Director of MO HealthNet, engaged with the Task Force regarding their proposal to create a state executive position—commonly referred to as a "czar"—to oversee substance abuse initiatives across multiple state departments. While acknowledging the potential benefits, Richardson cautioned about the practical challenges of consolidating authority over diverse departments.

The Task Force aims to enhance collaboration among state agencies to ensure cohesive and effective policies in addressing substance abuse. They seek to improve data collection to evaluate program effectiveness and fiscal accountability.

Overall, the Task Force plans to reconvene in July to continue their efforts towards advancing Missouri's response to substance abuse, building on recent progress in coordination and policy development.

### **New House committee sets goal to enact performance funding formula for higher education**

A newly-formed Missouri House committee entered a new phase in the multi-year process of developing a funding formula for the state's higher education institutions. The Special Interim Committee on Higher Education Performance Funding, which met for the first time this month, aims to establish a performance-based funding model that considers the unique missions of various institutions. This effort follows a 2022 appropriations bill that allocated \$450,000 to the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development for a study on performance funding models. The department has collaborated with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems to produce reports on higher education funding and efficiency.

The committee plans to implement the new model by 2027, with a preliminary version ready by January for simulation testing. Committee members acknowledge the difficulty of creating a fair formula, especially given the term limits on state lawmakers, which limit their experience. Leroy Wade, deputy commissioner of the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, emphasized the cooperative effort between the committee, the department, and higher education institutions, with the department handling the necessary calculations.

Representatives from many state colleges attended the committee meeting to share their views on the funding model. Mun Choi, president of the University of Missouri System, suggested that the formula should reward institutions for strong outcomes like high graduation rates and future earnings, and should account for the higher costs of certain degree programs. Elizabeth Kennedy, chair of the Council on Public Higher Education in Missouri, highlighted the issue of historic underfunding, particularly for the state's historically Black universities, Harris-Stowe State University and Lincoln University.

Kimberly Beatty, chancellor of Metropolitan Community College, stressed the importance of recognizing the differences between four-year institutions and community colleges in the funding model. She pointed out that current funding models exclude many valuable programs, such as apprenticeships and non-credit workforce training, which are crucial for workforce development but do not receive state funding. Beatty argued that around 20% of students are not counted towards full-time enrollment under the current model, which should be addressed in the new performance-based formula.

## **Missouri education commissioner departs after 19 years with Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven will leave her position with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at the end of the month, concluding 19 years with the department. She announced her departure in October 2023, citing it as the "right time to move on personally and professionally." Vandeven, an educator since 1990, became commissioner in 2015. Vandeven will next work as an education chief with the Missouri Department of Conservation and help with education research at Hoover Institution, a public policy think tank at Stanford University.

Incoming commissioner and former state senator Karla Eslinger will succeed her on July 1. Eslinger has served as a teacher, assistant commissioner, and adviser to federal education officials.

As Eslinger and the Department look to build upon and improve the state's education system, many priorities remain:

- **Attendance:** Missouri is focusing on getting highly trained teachers in classrooms, engaging students with competency-based and project-based learning, and educating parents on the importance of consistent attendance.
- **Reading Levels:** The state is emphasizing early intervention and the science of reading, with efforts to assess reading skills earlier and provide necessary interventions by the second grade.
- **State Curriculum:** While curriculum decisions are local, Vandeven noted a general move towards science-based reading curricula across districts.
- **Special Education:** Missouri is unique in its model for schools for the disabled, and a study is underway to evaluate its effectiveness.
- **Accreditation and Accountability:** Vandeven supports the Missouri School Improvement Plan 6 (MSIP6) for its balance of state standards and local flexibility, while recognizing the need for a common accreditation model for statewide comparison. MSIP6 has led to a more balanced distribution of district scores compared to MSIP5, reflecting a reset and new growth models.

## **Missouri Completes Successful Southern Border Deployment**

Governor Parson announced the successful completion of Missouri's Southern Border Deployment, which supported Texas Governor Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star to secure the Texas-Mexico border. The deployment, activated by Executive Order 24-03 on February 20, 2024, involved up to 200 Missouri National Guard members and 22 Missouri State Highway Patrol troopers.

The mission aimed to curb illegal immigration and drug trafficking. It resulted in a significant reduction in illegal-immigrant encounters and the seizure of millions of lethal doses of fentanyl. Missouri personnel played a crucial role in enhancing border security and community safety. Governor Parson thanked the deployed personnel and Governor Abbott for their leadership, expressing readiness to support future border security efforts if needed.

During the deployment, Missouri National Guard soldiers were stationed near Eagle Pass, Texas, reducing daily illegal-immigrant encounters from over 4,000 to less than 300 and capturing five

individuals on the terrorist watch list. The Missouri State Highway Patrol assisted with law enforcement, conducting traffic stops, arresting impaired drivers, and intercepting undocumented migrants. Operation Lone Star, supported by Missouri and other states, has apprehended over 513,100 illegal immigrants, arrested more than 43,700 criminals, and seized over 488 million lethal doses of fentanyl. Missouri's contribution included 50 soldiers from the 138th Infantry Regiment and 22 state troopers, who helped secure the border and address the fentanyl crisis.

"We express our sincere appreciation to our MONG and MSHP members who answered the call to help secure the Southern Border and stop illegal drugs and immigrants pouring into our nation. The mission has been a resounding success," Governor Parson said. "Missouri personnel undoubtedly helped better secure the border and make our communities safer. For now, we welcome our men and women in uniform home and congratulate them on a job well done. Should Governor Abbott and the State of Texas call on Missouri again, we are prepared to answer."

### **Governor Extends State of Emergency in Preparation for Potential Missouri River Flooding**

Governor Mike Parson has issued an executive order to extend the current State of Emergency in anticipation of potential flooding along the Missouri River in the coming days. The initial State of Emergency was declared by Governor Parson on May 2, 2024, through Executive Order 24-06, in response to severe weather conditions.

"We have witnessed the devastating impact of flooding in neighboring states to our north over the past week and must ensure that resources are available should flooding pose a threat to areas of our state," stated Governor Parson. "This extension enables us to be prepared to respond and support our communities. We urge Missourians to stay updated with their local forecasts and make necessary preparations to safeguard themselves and their loved ones."

Extending the State of Emergency ensures that the state can provide direct assistance to local jurisdictions, offering greater flexibility and capacity for response and recovery efforts. It is also the initial step required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to seek a major disaster declaration if statewide damages reach federal thresholds for Missouri.



Salem in a 1940s photo [State Historical Society of Missouri]

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