



## State Representative Rep Ron Copeland District 120

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### Missouri Legislature Advances Veteran Suicide Prevention Bill to Governor

An effort to reduce veteran suicides in Missouri has reached the governor's desk. The legislature approved two bills containing a comprehensive plan to address the issue. If signed by Governor Mike Parson, the legislation will require the Missouri Veterans' Commission to review and implement recommendations from the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019. The commission must also collaborate with the Department of Mental Health and report their efforts annually to the Department of Public Safety and the General Assembly. The goal is to ensure that data on veteran suicides is effectively utilized to improve outreach and treatment.

According to a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs report, 6,392 veterans nationwide died by suicide in 2021, an increase of more than 100 from the previous year. In Missouri, 185 veterans died by suicide that year, with the state's veteran suicide rate significantly higher than the national rate. The legislative effort aims to reduce this rate to zero.

The legislation's sponsor emphasized the importance of addressing mental health issues experienced during and after military service. "We're talking about reducing the number of men and women killing themselves due to issues from their service. It's crucial to engage with veterans soon after they return from deployment, discussing their experiences and impacts."

A key function of the legislation is to ensure that comprehensive data on veteran suicides is compiled and made available to relevant organizations like the American Legion, VFW, Marine Corps League, and DAV. The goal is to utilize this information to enhance outreach, treatment, and identification of those at risk of suicidal ideation. The Veterans Commission has already started implementing some of the bill's requirements.

Most Missourians likely know someone struggling with mental health issues, even if they aren't aware of it. Through this legislation, the hope is that more people will seek help for themselves or others. We all face mental health challenges, and being vulnerable is difficult. Every Missourian can make a difference, as even one person struggling is too many.

If you encounter someone in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts, the most important thing to do is listen. Tell them, "I'm not qualified to help you through this crisis, but I know someone who is and where you can get help." If needed, sit with them and dial 988 to connect them with support.

The proposal reached the governor's desk as a standalone bill in [House Bill 1495](#), and as part of [Senate Bill 912](#), which also addresses a number of other various aspects related to military affairs and veterans' services:

- **Information of Services by State Agencies for Veterans:** State agencies must include questions about veteran status and interest in receiving veteran services on forms used to interact with the public. They also need to share contact information of interested individuals with the Missouri Veterans Commission and provide information about veteran services.

- **Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, & Operation Allies Refuge Program:** A medallion program is established to honor veterans who served during specified operations. Eligible veterans, including Missouri National Guard members, can receive a medal of appreciation for their service.
- **Military Members Serving as Election Judges:** This section allows military service members on active duty in Missouri and nonresident military spouses to serve as election judges, effective from January 1, 2025.
- **Armed Forces Income Tax Deduction:** The income tax deduction for active and reserve members of the Armed Forces now includes signing bonuses, effective from January 1, 2025.
- **Educational Assistance for Missouri National Guard:** Missouri National Guard members can receive tuition and fee waivers for undergraduate courses or grants for eligible institutions. The waiver is applicable from the 2025-2026 academic year and is subject to certain conditions.
- **POW/MIA SSG Paul Hasenbeck Memorial Highway:** A highway in Osage County is designated as "POW/MIA SSG Paul Hasenbeck Memorial Highway".
- **Disabled License Plates and Windshield Placards:** Applicants for disabled license plates or windshield placards who are permanently disabled veterans don't need to provide physician's statements, if they present a statement from the United States Veterans' Administration verifying their disability.
- **Special License Plates Involving Military Actions or Personnel:** Special license plates related to military actions or personnel are exempt from special fees for issuance or personalization.
- **Disabled American Veterans Special License Plates:** Specifications for Disabled American Veterans special license plates are clarified.
- **Army of Occupation Medal Special License Plate:** An "Army of Occupation Medal" special license plate is created for recipients of the medal.
- **Veteran Designation on Driver's Licenses:** The list of accepted documents for obtaining a veteran designation on driver's licenses is expanded.
- **Uniform Deployed Parents Custody and Visitation Act:** This act regulates custody and visitation arrangements during the deployment of one custodial parent.
- **Missouri Veterans and Jobs Opportunity Grant Program:** A grant program is established to provide financial support to eligible employers who hire certain individuals, as specified in federal law.

These provisions aim to improve support for veterans, their families, and active-duty military personnel across various aspects such as mental health, education, taxation, and recognition of service.

The governor can choose to sign either or both bills into law, veto them, or allow them to become law without taking action. It is anticipated he will sign at least one of these proposals into law.

In the Show-Me State, we are deeply committed to the well-being of our veterans who have selflessly protected our nation, and wish to honor and recognize the sacrifices they have made. These bills passed with support from both sides of the aisle, and goes to show our unwavering commitment to honoring the bravery and sacrifice of our veterans who served honorably during pivotal periods in our nation's history. This is just one small step we can take to express our profound gratitude and ensure that their contributions are recognized and commemorated for generations to come.

### **Missouri's Legal Cannabis Generates \$19 Million for Veterans, Treatment, and Public Defenders**

Since the legalization of recreational marijuana in Missouri in 2022, over \$19 million has been allocated to support veterans, expand substance use treatment programs, and boost the budget of the Missouri Public Defenders System. This initiative, stemming from a constitutional amendment approved by voters, has provided substantial funding to these causes, with each receiving significant transfers of funds last fall and again earlier this month. Specifically, funds for the

Missouri Veterans Commission support healthcare and services for veterans and their families, the public defender system assists low-income individuals with legal representation, and the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) operates a grant program aimed at enhancing access to addiction treatment and community reintegration through job placement, housing, and counseling.

Revenue from recreational cannabis sales, which has reached \$58 million, covers state regulatory costs and court expenses for expunging certain marijuana offenses. Remaining funds are then distributed to the designated programs. This financial support is expected to continue growing, benefiting various critical services across Missouri.

### **Plan on Governor's Desk would Allow Investments by Rural Hospitals**

A plan to enhance the financial stability of Missouri's rural hospitals is awaiting the governor's action after the legislative session concluded earlier this month. The proposal aims to expand the authority of rural hospital boards to invest funds not needed for immediate obligations or operations. This is part of several measures proposed this year to support rural healthcare.

Given the financial struggles of small rural hospitals in recent years, this plan offers an opportunity for these hospitals to invest more of their funds in various stocks, bonds, and money market investments, potentially helping them recover financially and remain operational to provide quality healthcare statewide.

Historically, rural hospitals were restricted from investing non-operating funds, leading to regulations that limited their investment percentage. While hospitals sought full spending authority, House lawmakers found this unfeasible. Instead, this compromise allows hospitals to invest up to 15 percent of their funds in various investments, significantly more than previously allowed, helping them recoup funds and achieve financial stability.

The outdated law needed revision to better support rural hospitals, ensuring state statutes align with their current needs and benefit Missourians. This proposal was included in Senate Bill 1359, which the governor can sign into law, veto, or allow to become law without taking action.

### **Amendments 1 and 4 Scheduled for August Primary Ballot**

Missouri Governor Mike Parson has announced that Amendment 1 (SJR 26) and Amendment 4 (SJR 38) will appear on the ballot for the August 2024 Primary Election, set for August 6, 2024.

These amendments propose changes to the Missouri Constitution:

- **Amendment 1:** If approved, this amendment will allow the General Assembly to exempt from property tax all real and personal property used primarily for the care of a child outside of their home.
- **Amendment 4:** If approved, this amendment will permit a law that increases minimum funding for a police force established by a state board of police commissioners, provided the increase occurs before December 31, 2026. This aims to ensure these police forces have additional resources to serve their communities.

Other ballot measures will be included in the November General Election, pending certification by the Missouri Secretary of State's Office.

### **I-70 Improvement Project Begins**

This week, Missouri's Improve I-70 Program launched its first project with a groundbreaking ceremony in Columbia. Governor Mike Parson joined federal, state, and local officials, members of the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission, and the Design-Build contractor team to mark the start of Project #1: Columbia to Kingdom City.

“Today’s groundbreaking is significant not only because it marks the beginning of our historic Improve I-70 project but also because it represents the culmination of the bold infrastructure initiatives we’ve prioritized from the start,” said Governor Parson. “I-70 is one of Missouri’s oldest and most vital corridors. The safety and economic prosperity of Missourians depend on an interstate that grows with the state and nation. We are proud that the work we begin today will benefit Missourians for generations to come.”

Expanding I-70 to six lanes has been discussed in Jefferson City for decades. This historic, once-in-a-generation investment will benefit Missouri businesses, commuters, and tourists for years to come. This project is pro-infrastructure, pro-business, pro-jobs, and pro-Missouri.

Missouri’s FY2024 budget includes \$2.8 billion in General Revenue to fund the construction of a third lane in each direction on nearly 200 miles of I-70, from Blue Springs to Wentzville. The first project, Improve I-70: Columbia to Kingdom City, is a \$405 million fixed-cost contract to add an additional lane in each direction between U.S. Route 63 in Columbia and Route 54 in Kingdom City. It also includes \$123 million in previously programmed MoDOT projects to improve the I-70 interchanges at Route 63 and Route 54.

Improvements for Project #1: Columbia to Kingdom City will include new concrete pavement on all three lanes of I-70 in each direction. During construction, two lanes of traffic will remain open in both directions during peak hours.

Construction is set to begin in July 2024, with anticipated completion in late 2027.

For more details on Project #1, you can sign up for project emails and view the designs at

[www.modot.org/improvei70/columbiakingdomcity](http://www.modot.org/improvei70/columbiakingdomcity). For additional information, call MoDOT at 888-ASK-MODOT (275-6636) or visit [www.modot.org](http://www.modot.org).

### **An Update to the 2024 General Revenue Report**

The May 2024 General Revenue Report for Missouri indicates a 7.9% decrease in net general revenue collections compared to May 2023, with totals falling from \$1.59 billion to \$1.47 billion. However, the fiscal year-to-date collections saw a 1.3% increase, rising from \$12.01 billion to \$12.17 billion. Key changes include a 9.8% annual decrease in individual income tax collections and a notable introduction of \$707.5 million from Pass Through Entity taxes. Sales and use taxes increased by 10.4% annually, while corporate taxes saw a slight 0.6% rise. Other collections surged by 22.2%, though refunds also grew by 6.3%.

### **Recognizing Missouri Dairy Farmers**

On behalf of dairy farmers throughout the state, Missouri has proclaimed June to be Dairy Month. In a ceremony held at Central Dairy in Jefferson City, Lieutenant Governor Mike Kehoe, on behalf of Governor Mike Parson, proclaimed June as Dairy Month in Missouri.

Governor Parson expressed his gratitude, stating, "We appreciate the Lieutenant Governor presenting this proclamation on our behalf. We wholeheartedly support the Missouri dairy industry. Working on a dairy farm is not for the faint of heart, as the First Lady and I well know. We commend all Missouri dairy producers for their daily dedication to caring for their livestock and producing nutritious products."

"Our Missouri dairy producers strive to provide wholesome dairy products to consumers in Missouri and across the country," Director Chinn said. "I am proud to recognize those who rise with the sun day in and day out to produce high-quality products."

The Missouri dairy industry is valued at nearly \$242 million, contributing over \$2.1 billion in value-added services to the state. Missouri hosts 340 Grade A dairy farms. To learn more about the dairy industry in Missouri, visit [Modairy.org](http://Modairy.org).

To see legislation mentioned in this report, go to <https://house.mo.gov/LegislationSP.aspx>

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