

Tuesday, May 5, 2020

Organizations Call for Good Governance During Pandemic

The Missouri Legislature returned last week while actively discouraging the public from coming to the Capitol because of COVID-19. In the midst of a health pandemic and economic crisis, lawmakers advanced many bills containing provisions that have nothing to do with the budget or responding to the virus. Missourians are not operating as if it were business as usual and neither should lawmakers.

There's not much time remaining to help Missourians. The final two weeks of session started with 2,145,174 Missourians under active stay at home orders. Passing any omnibus bill with a response to the pandemic attached to unrelated matters threatens the ability for that pandemic response to reach people most in need. Omnibus bills open the door for single-subject lawsuits under Hammerschmidt. Passing bills unrelated to the budget or the COVID-19 virus without the scrutiny of sunshine taints the legislative process and public trust in the institution. That's why passing the budget and narrow pandemic legislation must be the priority before the end of session on May 15th.

Lawmakers are failing to lead by example if we are truly all in this together. Term limits mean that some lawmakers who want to pass a bill in their final year in the House or Senate may not have that opportunity. While frustrating, it is no excuse to push legislation without the public being able to engage in their First Amendment rights. Front-line medical professionals continue to operate under tense conditions with limited supplies. Businesses are closing for good. Unemployment numbers are going up. Weddings and funerals have been postponed. Vacations have been cancelled. High school and college seniors are not able to walk at graduation or finish the final season of their athletic career.

As long as voters who sent lawmakers to Jefferson City are unable to be part of a fully open and accessible government -- the cornerstone of democracy in the United States -- the only legislation that should be considered is the budget and bills directly related to COVID-19. Otherwise, a "government by the people" rings hollow and tarnishes the institution of the Missouri Legislature.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Missouri – Sara Baker – Policy Director
Americans for Prosperity Missouri – Jeremy Cady – President
Empower Missouri – Jeanette Mott Oxford – Executive Director
Missouri State Conference of the NAACP – Nimrod Chapel Jr. – President
United for Missouri – Carl Bearden – CEO
American Association of University Women
Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis
League of Women Voters of Missouri
Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation
Missouri Faith Voices
Missouri First, Inc.
Sierra Club Missouri Chapter
St. Louis Jewish Voice for Peace