

HCS HB 512 -- ETHICS

SPONSOR: Lovasco

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Downsizing State Government by a vote of 10 to 4.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 512.

This bill requires the Missouri Ethics Commission to investigate violations of election statutes relating to the use of public funds for political advertising purposes on printed materials. Any person may file a complaint against a state department or its director for violations. If the Missouri Ethics Commission or a court determines that there has been a violation of section 115.646, it shall impose penalties such as subjecting the department, director of state department, political subdivision, or principal officer of the subdivision or special district, to civil penalties in an amount equal to 10 times the expenditure that violated the section or \$10,000, whichever is greater. The defendant will also be ordered to pay the plaintiff's attorney's fees and court costs.

Publications in compliance with federal election laws and the full text of proposed ballot measures may be printed as specified in the bill.

This bill is similar to HCS HB 1777 (2020) and SB 480 (2021).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that some subdivisions use loopholes to spend taxpayer funds to educate on particular issues as long as they do not tell taxpayers whether to vote one way or another. However, many organizations use this loophole to influence voters one way or the other anyway. The bill will limit the educational information that is allowed to be paid for by taxpayer money. Supporters also note that publications must comply with certain procedures if they are going to present this information for the public. This will produce the standard of neutrality as should be shown on ballots and close the loophole.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Lovasco; and Arnie Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that there is already existing law that regulates this issue. This bill will negatively impact school districts as it would prevent them from printing materials to use for lessons in schools regarding civics classes or current events lessons.

Testifying against the bill were Missouri NEA; Missouri Association of School Administrators; and Susan Godlammer, Missouri School Board Association.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.