

Legislative Visit: Bill Guides and Tips

Thursday, March 9, 2017

BILL GUIDES

✓ = SUPPORT X = OPPOSE



Expanding Educational Opportunity

✓ Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credits (HF 386 [Kresha] / SF 256 [Chamberlain])

What it does: The bill creates tax credits for individuals and organizations that donate to scholarship granting organizations. Low- and middle-income students (up to \$89,000 for a family of four) are eligible to receive those scholarships. The bill also creates a refundable tax credit for low-income families (household income of less than \$33,500) to apply toward private school tuition expenses.

Talking points:

- Parents are the first educators of their children and should have the opportunity to choose a school where their child can thrive. No child's educational opportunity should be limited by her income or zip code. We must remove financial barriers that impede choice in education.
- Non-public schools are essential partners in helping to close the state's achievement gap. In many cases, they outperform neighboring public schools with comparable student populations.
- Education choice helps everyone. In 2015, the Nation's Report Card, comparing state-by-state progress in reading and math, indicated that Arizona, which has the longest-running opportunity scholarship tax credit, made the most progress in reading and third most progress in math.

Responses to common objections:

- The tax credits do not take any money away from the education budget, which is \$17 billion.
- Tax credits are constitutional. Minnesota already has an education tax deduction for tuition and tax credits for non-tuition expenses which have been upheld in court.
- Non-public schools are subject to the best accountability mechanism: parents, who can leave when dissatisfied. But low- and middle-income families trapped in public schools don't have that option.

Fostering Family Economic Stability

✓ Boost Minnesota Family Investment Program Assistance (HF 1603 [Pierson] / SF 806 [Hayden])

✓ Remove MFIP Marriage Penalty (HF 1453 [Hamilton] / SF 1165 [Benson])

What they do: The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) cash grant increase (HF 1603/SF 806) will increase by \$100 the monthly cash assistance available to families in poverty (currently capped at \$532/mo for a family of three). Removing the marriage penalty (HF 1453/SF 1165) will create an 18-month transition period after a couple marries before their MFIP benefits cease (normally, the new combined household income would make them ineligible). Upon amendment, removing this penalty will apply to all married households with a combined income under 275 percent of the federal poverty guideline, which is \$66,825 for a family of four.

Talking points:

- Increase cash assistance to struggling families, and make MFIP more marriage friendly.
- The MFIP cash grant has not increased since 1986, nor kept up with inflation, and families on the program continue to fall behind. We cannot use 1986 dollars to overcome poverty in 2017.

- Family stability is important for child well-being. We need to encourage people with children to form the marriage bond, which is a strong indicator of positive outcomes for children. Right now, MFIP's structure discourages marriage by making household income the test for eligibility.
- Both pieces of legislation have strong bi-partisan support.

Response to common objections:

- The price tag for the MFIP cash grant is not cheap (\$36 million annually), but the needs of the poor and vulnerable must be prioritized in our state budget in a time of surplus. Like a family budget, ensuring basic needs comes first.
- Removing the marriage penalty in MFIP does not apply to cohabitating couples, because cohabitation does not foster family stability and is shown to have negative outcomes for kids.

Protecting Life and Advancing Care

X Legalize Assisted Suicide (SF 1572 [Eaton])

✓ Palliative Care Advisory Committee (HF 345 [Zerwas] / SF 112 [Housley])

What they do: Legislation has been introduced to legalize assisted suicide. The legislation lacks sufficient safeguards that could allow for elder abuse and harm to vulnerable persons. It also undermines the practice of medicine and creates economic incentives that could endanger those with disabilities and anyone who needs costly treatments. Instead, Minnesota should be embracing policies that advance care, such as the Palliative Care Advisory Committee (HF 345/SF 112), which would convene people knowledgeable in palliative care, including patients, to advise the full Legislature about ways palliative care access and delivery can be improved in our state.

Talking points:

- Assisted suicide is wrong for a state with some of the best healthcare in the world. Let's create a state where no one feels that the only option they have is to end their life.
- Reject assisted suicide and instead embrace policies that advance quality care, such as better palliative care.
- Incredible progress has been made in palliative care, but there is a big gap in the training of healthcare professionals, as well as in access. We need to improve palliative care in Minnesota, and an advisory committee at the Minnesota Department of Health can recommend the best policies to the full Legislature in a time of limited resources.
- Palliative care is not just for the dying or those in hospice; it focuses on pain and symptom management for people at all stages of life.

Response to common objections:

- Creating laws that protect the choices of a few will actually endanger many more, particularly the poor, the disabled, and the elderly. Legalizing assisted suicide will have effects far beyond those who choose it.
- The safeguards in the assisted suicide bill are not adequate. For example, families need not be notified, the elderly and people with disabilities may be subject to undue influence, no witness or medical professional is required to be present at death to ensure consent, and there is no protection from insurers who will cover suicide but not treatment.

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

- **Be courteous and respectful.** Show up on time for your meetings. Keep things civil, even if you disagree on an issue. Be gracious and thank your lawmakers for their service and time.
- **Make personal connections.** Your legislator is a resident of your district. Introduce yourself and tell him/her where you live. Find common interests or acquaintances. Share about your work or experience if it's relevant to a bill.
- **Know the basics.** Be prepared to give a brief overview of a bill, and why you support/oppose it. Don't get into the weeds and stay on track. Identify the legislation by its bill number so lawmakers can keep tabs on it.
- **Follow up.** Your legislative visit can be the start of an ongoing dialogue with your lawmaker. Send a follow-up message expressing your gratitude and reiterating your points. Reference your visit in future communications.