

Dear League Members,

Have any of you wondered about the new laws (177) that went into effect on July 1st 2025 in our state? I've done some research into some of them that relate to League issues of interest and thought I might share some overviews from across the state. See below.

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HB 0932: Tennessee schools are required to enforce stricter cell phone policies

All public-school districts and charter schools in Tennessee will need to adopt policies that restrict the use of wireless communication devices by students in the classroom. This includes cell phones, tablets, computers, smartwatches and gaming devices.

Before the law takes effect, each public school district is required to have a discipline policy that allows teachers to take away a student's phone during class if it causes a distraction. Starting July 1, teachers are allowed to take away a student's cell phone, tablet, etc. during class if it violates the school's device policy.

For the 2025-26 school year and beyond, this bill requires each local board of education and public charter school to adopt and implement a wireless communication device policy that does the following:

- Bans students from using a wireless communication device during class time
- Authorizes a teacher to allow a student to use a wireless communication device for educational purposes during class time
- Allows a student to use a wireless communication device for emergencies or to manage a student's health
- Allows a student to use a wireless communication device during class time if the use of their device is included in the student's individualized education program or active 504 plan
- Creates a process to notify parents or guardians of emergencies at their child's school, ensuring device restrictions don't block emergency communication

HB 6004: Education Freedom Scholarship Act

This program provides families with scholarships for around \$7,000, depending on their student's individual needs and backgrounds. The money can be spent on tuition or related expenses, such as buying materials or equipment for classes. The program also included a one-time, \$2,000 bonus for teachers.

The proposal also included a "hold harmless" promise meant to address fears that public schools would lose money due to the program. It said public schools would be reimbursed if families choose to participate in the program and move their children to private schools. There will be 20,000 scholarships available in the program's first year, and half of those will be available for students from low-income families. If the number of scholarships given out exceeds 75% of the capacity of the program, the following year will have 5,000 more scholarships made available.

The universal school voucher program is expected to cost the state around \$447 million.

SB 0298: Bible Courses at public charter schools

This new law creates a pathway for local educational agencies and charter schools to offer Bible courses. The law allows local boards of education or public charter school governing bodies to approve bible courses. They must also implement the course "in accordance with the constitutions of the United States and this state."

A course for an academic study of the Bible that was approved by the state board of education before July 1, 2025, is not required to be approved by the local boards or governing bodies.

SB 0471: Success Sequence Act

Representative Gino Bulso (R-Brentwood) first proposed the legislation known as the "Success Sequence Act," which requires family life curricula to include lessons telling students that they would be successful if they take specific, sequential steps after high school.

Those steps are dubbed the "success sequence." It starts with people getting a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential, then either entering into the workforce or pursuing a postsecondary degree or credential, followed by getting married and having children.

Teachers are required to "provide instruction and evidence" about any possible positive outcomes the "success sequence" results in. A fiscal note said schools would not need to buy or update classroom materials and any budgetary impact the bill could have was not considered significant.

It also includes language saying, "children raised by married parents are more likely to flourish compared to children raised in single-parent families," and "couples who have children within marriage have higher family incomes and lower poverty rates than their unmarried counterparts."

The legislation did not cite where any of the data came from, but most of it appears to have been pulled from model legislation from The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

SB 1379: Childcare in unused school buildings

The Law allows childcare facilities to expand by leasing or purchasing vacant or underutilized school buildings.

The law requires school districts to report any underused or vacant properties they own. The original law only gave charter schools the first chance to buy or lease the property at fair market value.

Under this legislation, childcare agencies would have the right of first refusal. If a childcare agency and a charter school are operating in the same district, the childcare agency would have the right of second refusal.

The law also allows for schools to host childcare agencies as long as the host school's fire inspection and facilities are sufficient to meet the department's requirements for a provisional license.

SB 089 Forced entry-resistant windows and doors at schools

All public-school buildings, including public charter schools, built or remodeled after July 1, 2025 must to have "a clear window film or security glazing that meets a nationally recognized test standard for forced entry resistance, such as the ASTM F3561 test standard, for glazing systems of each exterior entry or door plus adjoining glazing and the secure interior vestibules serving as primary entrances to prevent individuals from entering the building without authorization."

The state-level safety team must also give guidelines to the state fire marshal to be included in the rules.

SB 1003: Pre-K screener

The legislation allows pre-k teachers to use a "universal screener" approved by the state board of education to measure student growth. This screener would replace the current "portfolio growth model."

The universal screener would generate individual growth scores for teachers. Kindergarten through second-grade teachers could also use universal math and reading screeners as an alternative evaluation method.

HB 0825: Teen Social Media and Internet Safety Act

Part of this new law goes into effect July 1 and another goes into effect Jan. 1, 2026.

Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, this law requires each school district and public charter school to prohibit students from accessing social media through the use of internet access provided by the school.

By the next school year, the Department of Education must develop a social media and internet safety curriculum for students in grades 6-12. It must include information about healthy behaviors and time management on social media, negative effects of social media on mental health, distribution of information on social media, how it manipulates behavior, the permanency of sharing things online, how to use social media safely, the importance of evaluating information generated by artificial intelligence and understanding misinformation and signs of potential human trafficking.

Parents and guardians will be allowed to opt their students out of the instruction by submitting a request to the principal. Students won't be penalized if they satisfactorily perform alternative lessons.

HB 0219: Land purchases by foreigners

The law requires "foreign persons" who obtain agricultural land in the state to report the acquisition to the commissioner of agriculture. People who acquire this are already required to report it to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

The commissioner of agriculture must notify the state attorney general of a "foreign person's" failure to file a copy of the report. The AG can then impose a civil penalty not to exceed 25% of the fair market value of the interest in the land and bring suit to collect the civil penalty in circuit court.

SB 0392- Harboring illegal immigrants

It's likely the most controversial new law in this July 1st batch. It makes it a felony to transport or conceal an illegal immigrant from law enforcement. There is worry from the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition that this could negatively impact families and nonprofits, but the bill sponsor, State Sen. Brent Taylor (R-Memphis) said in an interview that the law only applies if an individual or group makes money off of "harboring illegal immigrants." There is a lawsuit to block the implementation of the new law.

SB 1075 Banning Glock switches

This law ensures harsh penalties for anyone caught with a handgun allowing users to convert semi-automatic firearms into illegal fully automatic machine guns. It expands the definition of a machine gun in the state, elevating the charge from a Class E felony to a Class C felony.

SB 1360: Weapon makers protected from lawsuits

The law aims to limit lawsuits against sellers, manufacturers, or dealers of guns and other “qualified products” for damages caused by criminal misuse or unlawful acts, except under specific conditions. It also restricts local governments from creating laws that conflict with state laws on firearms and ammunition.

It also expands the definition of a "qualified product" from just firearms and ammunition to include knives, body armor, pepper spray, silencers, bump stocks, ammunition, magazines, scopes, sights, tasers and stun guns.

The bill also redefines "negligent entrustment" to mean that a seller is responsible if they knowingly provide a firearm or ammunition to someone who is likely to use it in a crime.

If civil action is taken against a dealer, manufacturer, or seller of a "qualified product," the complaint must allege that the defendant directly caused the damages alleged and the burden of proof is on the plaintiff to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that the civil liability action is not barred."

If someone wants to enforce a foreign judgment, meaning out of state or out of country, they must prove that it doesn't violate Tennessee's public policy on firearm liability.

The law also limits how local governments can regulate firearms.

Local governments are allowed to regulate the discharge of firearms within a city, county, town, municipality, or metropolitan government "except when and where the discharge of a firearm is expressly authorized or permitted by state law," regulate the location of privately owned shooting ranges and regulate the enforcement of any state law pertaining to firearms, ammunition, or components of firearms or ammunition.

HB 0622 “Dismantle DEI in employment Act”

Prohibits a county government, municipal government, metropolitan government, local education agency (LEA), public institution of higher education, and state from basing an employment decision on any metric that considers an applicant’s or employee’s race, ethnicity, sex, age, or any other demographic characteristic, rather than on individual merit, qualifications, veteran status, or lawful eligibility criteria.

Removes a present law provision requiring the commissioner of education to recommend, and the state board of education to adopt, a policy to promote educator diversity.

SB 0449: Fertility treatment and Contraceptive Protection Act’

Senator Becky Duncan-Massey (R-Knoxville) introduced this bill in the Senate, and Representative Iris Rudder (R-Winchester) introduced the House version — both Republican women lawmakers. It's otherwise known as the "Fertility Treatment and Contraceptive

Protection Act." The legislation adds legal definitions of "contraception" and "contraceptive" to the state code. Those formal definitions include emergency contraceptives, sterilization procedures and "any device, medication, biological product, or procedure that is intended for use in the prevention of pregnancy, whether specifically intended to prevent pregnancy or for other health needs."

Contraceptive products will need to be legally marketed under the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, which requires manufacturers to submit evidence of new drugs' safety and effectiveness before they can be sold.

It also adds a formal definition of "fertility treatment" to the state code, which includes the preservation of embryos and in vitro fertilization treatments — a type of fertility treatment that was briefly banned in Alabama last year after that state's Supreme Court found that embryos created through IVF should be considered children.

The legislation adds language to the state code saying, "Notwithstanding another law, an individual has a right to engage in activities associated with fertility treatment and contraception."

It also adds language that says the state's laws do not prohibit activities associated with contraception or fertility treatment, and that, "The law of this state clearly and unambiguously acknowledges the right of a healthcare provider to perform, and the right of a person, to receive or use, fertility treatment and contraceptives in this state."

HB 0026: The "Unborn Child Protection Act"

This bill enacts the "Unborn Child Protection Act of 2025," which prohibits a person or entity from mailing or delivering an abortion-inducing drug into this state.

This bill defines an "abortion-inducing drug" as a drug or medication that is intended to be used, and is used, to terminate the life of an unborn child, which includes mifepristone, misoprostol, and mifeprex (RU-486) when possessed or distributed to terminate the life of an unborn child. It does not include a drug or medication that is possessed or distributed for a purpose that does not include the termination of the life of an unborn child, such as misoprostol that is used for treating a stomach ulcer.

This bill provides that if a person or entity mails or delivers an abortion-inducing drug into this state and the mailing or delivery results in the death of an unborn child, then the person or entity is strictly liable in the amount of \$5 million in damages for the death of the unborn child. Any action brought to recover such damages must proceed under civil procedure law for an injury resulting in death and an action must be commenced within five years of the death of the unborn child.