



2015 SESSION UPDATE

from the Office of Senator Michelle Benson

Proudly serving the people of Senate District 31

For the week ending on March 13, 2015

Dear friends,

So often we talk about taxes, but that is not the only conversation going on in St. Paul. The Human Services committees regularly deal with difficult issues facing the poor, disabled, and elderly. Last week we got just a bit of sunshine. We got to hear about Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM). This program takes state dollars (\$250,000 annually) to provide financial coaching to low income families. When families receive coaching, they become eligible for matched savings. As those families save, private donations are used to match their savings. The family savings can only be used for down payment on a home, post-secondary education, or small-business investment. Of the 6000 individuals who completed training, there have been zero foreclosures, and 90% of small businesses were in business after 2 years, and 96% have completed higher education degrees.



The FAIM program reaches families on welfare programs and helps them move off government dependence. Their next step is financial training for the children to encourage saving and planning for the future.

I have met these families and they are very grateful for the opportunity to learn financial discipline and are thankful they are becoming more financially independent.

Child Protection Task Force

On Thursday, the MN Senate unanimously confirmed HF8, which fast tracks two key recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children:

- Repealing a law passed last year that prohibits the use of screened-out maltreatment reports by caseworkers
- Clarifies that the health and safety of children are the number one consideration when reports of neglect and maltreatment are received

It will allow caseworkers to form a more complete picture by being able to consider *all* important information when making a decision. Our system hasn't worked in the past and we need to keep all of Minnesota children in mind.

Town Hall Meeting

Please note that, because of the legislative session, this meeting is subject to change. Any change will be posted in my newsletter and on my Facebook page at facebook.com/senatorbenson

Tuesday, April 7, 7:00 PM
With Speaker Kurt Daudt
Zimmerman City Hall
12980 Fremont Ave
Zimmerman, MN 55398

There is a lot going on at the Capitol. I would love to have you join me at these town hall meetings to hear your comments and concerns.

What's New?

Last week, I wrote about [SF844, my Return on Taxpayer Investment bill](#). This bill would establish a method of evaluating potential returns on certain human services and corrections programs. This bill passed out of Health and Human Services Policy Committee, and will likely be heard in the Health and Human Services Budget Committee soon.

Additionally, I am carrying [SF1300](#), a bill that Rep. Marion O'Neill has worked extensively on. The bill would modify existing provisions and establish new requirements for the reporting and documenting of sexual assaults that occur on Minnesota's college campuses. This bill is an important step in protecting those who fall victim to terrible crimes such as these. The bill will be heard in the Senate Higher Education committee on Tuesday afternoon.



Reinforcing our children's safety & privacy

Senate Republicans introduced the ["Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act"](#) this week to address serious concerns raised by the new, controversial Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) policy that allows transgender students to play on sports teams other than the teams of the student's biological sex. This policy, in effect, allows male students who identify as females to play on girls' sports teams, and vice versa. Families, parents, churches, and schools resisted, expressing concern over potential effects on locker rooms and shower situations, as well as private schools, but the Board gave into a very small number of special interests and passed the policy anyway.

The Republican proposal, [SF1543](#), clarifies state law and sends a message to concerned parents and families that we are listening to their concerns. It ensures students' safety and privacy by defining who is eligible to participate on school sports teams and requires that facilities like bathrooms and locker rooms are separated based on biological sex. For students who are uncomfortable using their biologically corresponding facility, private facilities will be made accessible to them.

Legislative Lingo

Many of you watch committee hearings and floor sessions online and it can be very confusing if you are not familiar with some of the terminology. Here are just a few of some of the more common words and phrases used throughout the legislative process:

"Budget target": This refers to a set number of dollars by which committees can fund programs within their purview, based on the budget forecast.

"Omnibus bill": Omnibus is Latin for "for everything." Omnibus bills are pieces of legislation that cover a wide variety of areas and initiatives, but are voted on as one single bill.

"Laid over for inclusion": Having a bill being "laid over for [possible] inclusion..." means that a certain bill, after being heard in a committee, has passed through that committee and may be included in an omnibus bill.

"First deadline": This refers to one of three deadlines set by the legislature, setting a specific date by which policy bills must be heard in their body of origin.

"Bonding": The State borrows money by issuing bonds, which are then authorized by the legislature to pay for things like large public works projects.



Senate Republicans have been busy this session proposing commonsense approaches to education in Minnesota. Among these proposals are a series of bills introduced this week that would allow for better access to school choices for thousands of Minnesota kids.

Connect with Senator Benson

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As always, constituents are more than welcome to come visit me at the Capitol with or without an appointment. You can listen in on a committee hearing, chat with me by the Senate Chamber, or go on a tour of the Capitol.



/SenatorBenson



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