

PRESS RELEASE



State Representative Jeff Harris Minority Leader



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House Democrats demand reform of fee office patronage system

Bill would take money from cronies and put it into public education

JEFFERSON CITY – Minority Leader Jeff Harris (D-Columbia), Rep. Wayne Henke (D-Troy) and the members of the House Democratic Caucus demanded action today on House Bill 541, which would reform Missouri's outdated fee office contract system. The bill, sponsored by Henke, would eliminate the patronage system currently used by Missouri governors to award fee office contracts, and instead direct profits to local public schools.

"It is time for us to bring this system into the 21st century," said Harris. "Let's put the state license fees to work for the Missouri people."

In a press conference this morning, Harris and Henke called upon Speaker Rod Jetton (R-Marble Hill) to get this bill to the House floor for debate. Henke's bill was filed early last month, but has yet to be assigned to committee. Henke has made a formal request to have the bill assigned to the Transportation Committee, but has yet to receive a response from the House leadership.

HB 541 would create two processes through which the state would assign fee office contracts. Primarily, non-profit organizations set up by local school districts, or other community service organizations, would be given preference in running their area fee office. These organizations would use the fees to hire and train office staff, and then direct their profits (the money that is currently going into the pockets of the politically well-connected) into the local schools or the community.

If no such non-profit seeks the contract, then the position is awarded through the state's competitive bidding process. The lowest bidder would specify the amount of money they would need to operate the office with some profit, with all fees collected over that amount being directed into the public school districts in the office's county. Henke pointed out that he and Harris have been calling for these reforms since before Gov. Blunt's inauguration.

"These reforms are long overdue," said Henke. "In the last 75 years, the state has eliminated patronage from every other contract process in the government—except this one."

Harris said he expected the proposal could bring in \$15 million to \$20 million in revenue for local school districts.

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