

NEWS RELEASE



State Rep. Luke Scavuzzo

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House committee hears Rep. Scavuzzo's bill to eliminate political patronage at license fee offices

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The House Special Committee on Government Affairs held a public hearing today on a bill sponsored by state Rep. Luke Scavuzzo, D-Harrisonville, to eliminate the longtime practice of allowing the governor to award contracts to run the Missouri's license fee office as perks to his political supporters.

Under HB 1866 priority for the contracts would go to local public school district foundations or charitable organizations. A contract could be awarded to private individuals through a competitive bidding process if no non-profit group is interested in running a particular office. Missouri has 183 fee offices where residents must go to obtain or renew their driver's licenses or vehicle license plates.

“Over the decades a lot of friends, relatives and political donors of whoever happened to be governor at the time have gotten wealthy off the captive customer base of Missourians who need to renew their licenses,” Scavuzzo said. “With Missouri guaranteed of having a new governor next year, the contracts will be redistributed anyway. That makes now the perfect time to implement a new system and eliminate one of the last vestiges of political patronage from Missouri government.”

Governors of both parties have awarded the contracts as patronage. However, Gov. Matt Blunt, who has abandoned his planned re-election bid this year, expanded the system upon taking office in 2005 by converting the 11 state-run license offices – which were among the largest and most profitable – into patronage operations.

House Democrats have pushed legislation to end the patronage system for several years, including HB 638 that Scavuzzo sponsored last year. None of those previous bills received a committee hearing.

“After years of fee office reform being blocked, I am optimistic that this legislation is finally making progress in the House,” Scavuzzo said.

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