**Illinois Updates – April 12, 2024**

Karen Yarbrough Dead at 73

Cook County Clerk Karen Yarbrough died on Sunday, according to her spokesperson. She was 73. A veteran politician, Yarbrough was the first woman and the first Black candidate to hold the office. Prior to becoming clerk, Yarbrough also served as county recorder and spent several years in the Illinois House. During her tenure in Springfield, she spearheaded major bills including the effort to enact a statewide smoking ban and legislation banning executions. Active in Democratic county politics, she mentored many and her passing has drawn tributes from her colleagues throughout the state. Yarbrough was reelected to a full term in 2022, meaning that the county will hold a special election in November to determine her replacement. It is expected that a temporary appointment will be made until the special election is held.

COGFA Shares Revised Estimates

The Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA) has revised its revenue forecast for the current fiscal year. The commission shared that state revenue estimates were up by $413 million this March, and that the state is ahead by $831 million over the same period in 2023. The forecast cautioned that April is typically volatile with income tax collections coming in, and was not including any projected numbers for the current month. COGFA is a legislative support agency that provides the General Assembly with financial information including revenue estimates and forecasting.

Danville Quaker Plant to Close

Quaker Oats announced last week that it would close its Danville production facility and lay off more than 500 workers. The closure is related to an earlier recall of certain Quaker products. When the company conducted a review of the plant in the wake of the recall, they determined that it would require extensive upgrades and repairs. The Pritzker administration announced it would be working with local authorities to identify businesses that could convert the space for a new venture. Vermilion County Works, the city of Danville and Danville Area Community College will offer support to workers affected by the layoff, including one-on-one assistance with resume writing and interviewing skills.

Ozinga Resigns

Representative Tim Ozinga (R-37, Mokena) announced Monday that he would be resigning his seat in the Illinois House. Ozinga was elected in 2020 and at one time headed up the political arm of the House Republican caucus. Some statehouse insiders believe he may be leaving office to gear up for a statewide run. Ozinga had previously expressed interest in succeeding Jim Durkin as House Republican Leader, but was unsuccessful, losing to Leader Toni McCombie. He is the scion of a concrete company and can infuse any future political race with significant funding. A replacement has not been named, but Patrick Sheehan, who lost a close race in the 2022 general election against Senator Mike Hastings (D-Frankfort) is considered a front runner for the appointment.

Gillespie to Lead Department of Insurance

Governor JB Pritzker announced Monday his appointment of Senator Ann Gillespie (D-27, Arlington Heights) as the Director of the Illinois Department of Insurance. Gillespie will succeed Dana Popish Severinghaus, who had served since 2021. Senator Gillespie is an attorney specializing in healthcare law and consulting, and sponsored the administration’s bill to create a state-based healthcare marketplace to replace the state-federal model. She will resign her seat and assume the directorship on April 15. Representative Mary Beth Canty (D-54) and Mark Walker (D-53), both representing Arlington Heights, have expressed interest in being appointed to the seat.

Harmon Files Public Defender Legislation

Senate President Don Harmon filed legislation last week to create a statewide office to support public defenders. An amendment to Senate Bill 595 will create the Office of Public Defense Trial Support, an initiative of the Illinois Supreme Court and a product of the court’s 2021 study that revealed shortcomings in the state’s defense counsel. In addition to providing support the newly-created office will also provide strategic planning to address pressure points in the public defender system. The office will operate under the direction of the Supreme Court, and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts will provide administrative support through June 30, 2026.

Biden Holds Chicago Fundraiser

President Joe Biden traveled to Chicago this week for a high-dollar fundraiser on the city’s Gold Coast. Hosted by Michael Sacks of Grosvenor Investments and Laura Ricketts of the Chicago Cubs Organization, the event was expected to raise $2.5 million for the president’s reelection campaign. Biden was greeted on his arrival in Chicago by Mayor Brandon Johnson, Congressman Danny Davis and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. Speaking at the event, the President had harsh words for his opponent, former President Donald Trump, and outlined the differences between his vision of America and that of his predecessor. Biden also scheduled a similar campaign stop in Wisconsin.

Marquez Called Out for Falsifying Information

Former Commonwealth Edison lobbyist Fidel Marquez was rebuked by U.S. District Judge Mary Rowland for responding falsely to questions on a gun owners permit application. Marquez was the star witness in the trials of his fellow lobbyists at the utility, who were found guilty of bribing former House Speaker Michael J. Madigan in return for favorable consideration of the company’s legislative initiatives. Marquez cooperated with the U.S. Attorney’s office and is also expected to provide testimony in the related case against Madigan this fall. When completing an application to purchase a handgun in Arizona, Marquez responded no to questions regarding whether he had ever been under indictment or convicted of a felony. Rowland call the false document a “gift” for the defense, pointing out it would be used to question the credibility of his testimony. Marquez attorney characterized the act as a mistake, explaining that his client wanted a gun to control snakes hear his Arizona home.

Administration, Legislature Focus on Food Deserts

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development said this week they will put another $14 million toward opening grocery stores in food deserts. The Illinois Grocery Initiative will support businesses who locate in underserved areas. It is the second round of funding, with the program offering $20 million total in support. According to the Department, nearly 3 million Illinois residents have difficulty sourcing good food, with many depending on convenience stores and other businesses to access groceries. Businesses seeking to establish grocery stores can apply to the Department for grants.

In related news, Senate Bill 3265 passed the Senate this week. The bill, sponsored by Senator Dale Fowler (R-59, Harrisburg) directs the Illinois Department of Agriculture to conduct an access to nutritious food program which will include projects and promote strategies to combat food deserts. The program will focus on distribution to underserved areas as well as preparation of nutritious foods.

Recent Gubernatorial Appointments

Governor JB Pritzker has made appointments to the following boards and commissions:

* John Pady is appointed to the Energy Workforce Advisory Council.
* Danny Silverthorn is reappointed to the State Employees’ Retirement System Board of Trustees.

All appointments are subject to Senate confirmation.

Upcoming Meetings and Hearings

* April 16, 2024 – Joint Committee on Administrative Rules

Election Calendar

* November 5, 2024 – General Election

Dates to Remember

* April 5, 2024 – House Committee deadline
* April 12, 2024 – Senate Third Reading deadline
* April 19, 2024 – House Third Reading deadline
* May 3, 2024 – Committee deadline for bills from other chamber, House and Senate
* May 17, 2024 – Third Reading deadline for bills from other chamber, House and Senate
* May 24, 2024 - Adjournment