

THE WEEKLY WHIP

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2007

CLEAN CARS – HB 54 & HB 131

Thursday, the Environmental Matters Committee will hear bills designed to establish a Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) Program, commonly known as “Clean Cars.”

According to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), vehicle emissions contribute significantly to air pollution nationwide, and are the primary source of air pollution in many urban areas. This contributes to a variety of debilitating respiratory diseases, including asthma, that affect thousands of Marylanders.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) reports Marylanders drive over 135 million miles daily, contributing up to 40% of the state’s air pollution. Experts estimate enhancing emission standards would have the same effect as taking 190,000 cars off the road.

The proposed legislation (HB 44, HB 131) would require every new car sold in Maryland to be more fuel-efficient, which would reduce carbon dioxide and other emissions that create air pollution. The new regulations would take effect beginning with the 2011 model year.

Under the proposals, car buyers could not circumvent the standards by shopping out of state – the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) would be prohibited from titling or registering a non-compliant vehicle bought out-of-state by a Maryland resident.

The proposals would not affect used vehicles or most vehicles owned by people who move to Maryland from states without clean car standards.

Eleven states – including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York – have clean car standards. *The Baltimore Sun* reports New York’s standards have made a measurable impact on air quality and public health, and auto dealers who opposed the law now say it did not drive away business. For a copy of that article, call x3398.

Last session, we passed the Healthy Air Act, joining our neighbors in the northeast to address air pollution and build a healthier Maryland. Clean cars will build on that foundation by further reducing smog and other toxic compounds in our air that contribute to cancer, asthma and other debilitating diseases in Maryland.

EARLY VOTING – HB 201

Also Thursday, the Ways & Means Committee will hear HB 201, a proposed amendment to the Maryland constitution which would permit on-site early voting.

In 2005 and 2006, two bills established on-site early voting. SB 478 (2005) created 5-day early voting period prior to a primary or general election, required at least one early voting site in each county, and three sites in each of the Big 7. HB 1368 created polling places on college campuses and established early voting locations for each of the Big 7 counties.

Both bills were vetoed by the Governor, overridden by the legislature, challenged in – and overturned by – the court. Guided by the court ruling, HB 201 would amend the Constitution to permit on-site early voting.

At last count, 35 states have early voting. Conservative states like Utah and Wyoming have it, as do liberal states like Hawaii and Vermont. Some states allow early voting at satellite locations. West Virginia, for example, has early voting at courthouses, North Carolina at libraries, California at shopping centers, and Colorado at grocery stores. The average time for early voting in other states is 10 to 14 days prior to the election.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS – AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

A constitutional amendment starts like any other bill – it gets a number, a committee assignment, and moves through the process. If it is reported out of committee, a constitutional amendment requires a 3/5 majority in both chambers – 85 votes in the House and 29 in the Senate. If it receives the necessary votes, it is submitted to the voters in the next statewide general election – in this case, that election will be held in November 2008.

HEARINGS OF NOTE

Clean Cars proposals (HB 54 & 131)
Thursday at 1:00p.m. – Environmental Matters
Early Voting Constitutional Amendment (HB 201)
Thursday at 11:00a.m. – Ways & Means

REAL ID

Several members have asked for information about the federal Real ID Act in order to respond to constituent inquiries about drivers' licensing issues. Here is a quick overview of the issue:

Real ID is a federal program created to raise minimum issuance standards for drivers' licenses and state-issued ID cards. Critics contend it will turn state drivers' licenses into national identity cards, while proponents maintain it is a critical tool for verifying and protecting all Americans.

Effective May 11, 2008, federal agencies cannot accept a drivers' license or state-issued ID card that does not comply with Real ID standards for an official purpose such as boarding an aircraft.

To comply with Real ID, states will, at the very least, have to receive and verify the following information from every driver's license applicant:

- A photo identity document (non-photo if it includes full legal name and date of birth),
- Documentation showing a person's date of birth,
- Proof of a person's Social Security or verification of non-eligibility,
- Documentation showing a person's name and address of principal residence.

Despite the May 2008 deadline, the federal government has not issued the regulations states need to implement Real ID. The state cannot change its licensing system, or even estimate the cost of changing its system, until those regulations are issued.

It took five years to implement system-wide changes the last time Maryland changed its licensing system, which raises legitimate concerns about the state's ability to react to the federal regulations in a timely fashion.

Organizations including the National Conference of State Legislatures and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators are urging Congress to delay implementation of the law – which they estimate will cost over \$10 billion to implement nationwide.

Calling the costs associated with the measure an unfunded federal mandate, the Maine General Assembly became the first in the nation to pass a resolution demanding Congress repeal the act.

CABINET APPOINTMENTS

Disabilities

Catherine Raggio

Higher Education

Dr. James E. Lyons

Housing and Community Development

Raymond A. Skinner

Human Resources

Brenda Donald Walker

Labor Licensing & Regulation

Tom Perez

Public Safety & Correctional Services

Gary Maynard

DATES TO REMEMBER

January 31 – Governor delivers “State of the State”

February 1 – Election of the State Treasurer

February 9 – House bill introduction deadline

If you need information to answer a constituent inquiry or have questions about an issue, do not hesitate to call on your whip. This year's whips, by committee, are:

Appropriations Whips

Delegate Bill Bronrott

Delegate Keith Haynes

Economic Matters Whips

Delegate Sally Jameson

Delegate Michael Vaughn

Environmental Matters Whips

Delegate Marvin Holmes

Delegate Doyle Niemann

Health & Government Operations Whips

Delegate Sue Kullen, Chief Deputy Whip

Delegate Shirley Nathan-Pulliam

Judiciary Whips

Delegate Susan Lee

Delegate Victor Ramirez

Ways & Means Whips

Delegate Anne Kaiser

Delegate Justin Ross, Chief Deputy Whip