

# REPORT FROM STATE CIRCLE

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## MARRIAGE EQUALITY

**SB 290 and HB 351 (RSC 2) - Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act**, which the LWVMD supports, will not be voted out of committee this year. However, the Senate passed **SB 566** (Garagiola & Kelley) - **Health Care Facility Visitation and Medical Decisions – Domestic Partners** on March 18, 2008 by a vote of 30 to 17. **SB 566** defines domestic partnerships and confers rights regarding health care facility visitation and medical decisions, including decisions regarding funeral arrangement. A “domestic partnership” is a relationship between

two individuals who are: at least 18 years old; not related by blood or marriage; not married or in a civil union or domestic partnership with another person; and agree to be in a relationship of mutual interdependence in which each individual contributes to the maintenance and support of the other individual and the relationship. Individuals who assert a domestic partnership may be required to provide a signed affidavit and documented proof of a relationship, such as a joint checking account or property ownership. Cross filed **HB 733** will be heard in the House on March 25, 2008.

The second reading of **SB 597** (Kramer et al) **Recordation and Transfer Taxes – Exemptions – Domestic Partners** passed with amendments on March 21<sup>st</sup>. This bill exempts the transfer of property between domestic partners and former domestic partners from the recordation tax and State and county transfer taxes. This bill is cross filed with **HB 746** (Kaiser et al).

Also under consideration is **SB 523** (Robey et al), cross filed with **HB 668** (Hixson et al) **Inheritance Tax – Exemptions – Domestic Partners**. This bill exempts from State inheritance tax the receipt of property passing from a decedent to a domestic partner of the decedent. This bill may not get a vote this year because of Maryland’s budget difficulties. Some legislators are reluctant to extend these tax breaks. The real estate transfer taxes accrue to local jurisdictions, while the inheritance tax goes to the State.

Equality Maryland, which LWVMD has partnered with in support of **SB 290** and **HB 351**, supports the above legislation.

*Sherry Hyman*

## REVENUES

The issues surrounding the computer services tax continue to be unresolved with all bills still in committee. There was a failed attempt on the floor of the House to reduce the proposed budget by \$100 million and to use \$114 million in General Fund surplus in order to allow for repeal of the tax.

The League submitted testimony in favor of **HB 904** (Guitierrez et al). HB 904 would increase the taxes on alcoholic beverages, some of which have remained unchanged since 1955. It is estimated that passage of this legislation would increase state revenues by about \$45 million per year which would be placed in the General Fund.

**SB 1004** (Jones) was late filed and heard four days later by B&T on March 12. This bill would restore the two top levels of the Maryland Income Tax which were removed from the governor's tax proposals during the 2007 Special Session. The tax rate on taxable incomes from \$750,000 to \$1 million would be 6% and on taxable incomes above \$1 million would be 6.5%.for tax years 2008 through 2012. The Department of Legislative Services estimates that this tax structure would raise \$170 million a year. Because it would take effect on July 1, 2008, FY 2009 would benefit from an extra half year of tax revenues for a total of \$232 million.

## BUDGET

Action on the budget saw a great deal of activity in the past few weeks. There was a new and sobering revenue estimate and both the Senate and the House passed their versions of **SB 90**, the Budget Bill. The resulting differences will be resolved in conference committee. If the Budget Bill is not reconciled by March 31, the governor must extend the legislative session and the only business allowed during the extension would be the budget.

The new revenue estimate by the State Board of Revenue Estimates projects that revenues for fiscal 2008 and 2009 will be \$332.9 million less than previously estimated, \$75 million for the current fiscal year and the balance for the next.

In response, the Senate passed a bill which is \$390.9 lower than that proposed by the governor. Some of the reductions made by the Senate include halving the Chesapeake Bay 1020 Trust Fund established during the Special Session to \$25 million; reducing InterCounty Connector funding by \$32 million, stem cell research by \$18 million leaving \$5 million, Medicaid by \$40 million in State and Federal funds, and the Maryland Transit Administration capital appropriation by \$50 million. Medicaid expansion to parents implementation would be delayed by six months and the Small Employer Health Benefit Plan Premium Subsidy Program fund was made contingent on enactment of **SB 974/HB 1587**, establishing a uniform hospital assessment to collect uncompensated care savings.

Some of the differences in the House version would reduce funding for the University of Maryland College Park and Morgan State University capital projects funding by \$16.1 million; Maryland Transit Administration operating expenses by an additional \$1.5 million; and local trans grant programs by \$11.7 million. The Medicaid budget would be reduced by an additional \$7.3 million and Medicaid budget funds which may be transferred for providing inflationary rate adjustments to local providers by \$8.7 million to \$4.3 million. The expansion of Medicaid to parents was restored contingent on **SB 974/HB 1587** and stem cell research funds were increased to \$15 million (a reduction of \$8 million from the original proposal). Pre-funding of retiree health benefits were reduced by an additional \$43 million to \$103.8 million from the Senate reduction of \$60.7 million. Pre-funding of retiree health benefits were reduced by an additional \$43 million to \$103.8 million from the Senate reduction of \$60.7 million.

On the positive side, state funds available for higher education would increase by 9%; even with the Medicaid reductions, funding would increase by \$529 million; Bay Restoration Funds would increase by \$58 million

(64%) in addition to the \$25 million dedicated to the new Chesapeake Bay 2010 Fund. Education aid would increase 3.5% or \$180 million including funding and, for the first time, the Geographic Cost of Education Index. All workers would receive a 2% general salary increase, and additional funding would be provided for a number of public safety initiatives,

Overall, the general fund would grow by 3.8% and would leave a cash balance totaling close to \$1 billion. The proposed budget is \$156 million below the Spending Affordability Committee limit on spending growth.

Barbara Hankins

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This year's legislation concerning Domestic Violence looks like a "Protective Orders Festival." Several developments concerning orders have done very well. **HB 183/SB 392 (RSC2) - DV-Enforcement of Protective Order** – resoundingly passed in both houses. Another bill - **HB 182/SB393 – Permanent Protective Order After Conviction and Imprisonment**, which makes the protective order permanent for specified acts of abuse *unanimously* passed both houses.

Another possibly good surprise is **SB 42 – Temporary Protective Orders – Surrender of Firearms** – which passed in the Senate 29-17 after being held on special order by Senator Mooney. Crossfiled with **HB 640**, this bill authorizes a judge in entering a temporary P.O. to order a person to surrender to law enforcement any firearms for a specified time period.

**HB 1448 – Family Law - Protective Orders – Surrender of Firearms** is possibly the best P.O.-strengthening effort of all. The bill was introduced by JUD Chairman Vallario at the request of the State Police. Instead of allowing the court's discretion to order the respondent to surrender firearms to law enforcement, HB 1448 would require the court to enter such a form of relief. This bill will make Maryland law consistent with Federal law.

On a different subject, DV advocates are working to kill **HB 917 - Simple Assault** which passed 125-5 on 3/18. They are lobbying hard in JPR because they fear that despite amendments, the bill still contains "objectionable pieces" which could damage DV victims. They want the bill killed and remanded to summer study for more careful consideration.

Previously reported **HB 182/SB 394 (RSC2) "No Contact"** – failed in the respective committees.

Carol Sures

## GOOD GOVERNMENT

**HB 358/SB 819, Maryland Funding Accountability and Transparency Act**, introduced by Delegate Miller, et al, and Senator Mooney, et al. These cross-filed bills will require that the Department of Budget and Management develop a searchable web-based data base that includes information on state grants, contract, etc. greater than \$25,000. HB 358 has passed the House and SB 819 was heard by B&T on 3/19. Although we did not submit testimony, the League supports this type of bill under the LWVUS "Principle" that "government bodies protect the citizens' right to know by . . . making public records accessible." ....

Kay Terry

## JUSTICE

## DEATH PENALTY

For opponents of the death penalty, there's bad news and good news. The bad news is that both the Senate and House bills for **Repeal, SB 645** and **HB 1328** (*See RSC 3*) will probably die in committee. Both have been heard with no action and no votes. Since membership in the Senate's Judiciary Committee has not changed since its unfavorable vote last year, perhaps "no action" could be viewed as a "plus".

On the brighter side, all the bills favoring the death penalty have received unfavorable reports. Dead again this year is legislation which would have exempted death penalty protocols from the Maryland Administrative Procedures Act, **HB 1250**. (*See RSC 3*). A Court of Appeals decision that Maryland's lethal injection executions were not approved under the terms of the Act has, in effect, halted executions in Maryland until or unless the Legislature exempts the death penalty from the act, or the Governor sets up a method to have the procedure reviewed. Governor O'Malley, who opposes the death penalty, appears in no hurry to submit the lethal injection protocols for review. Also dead following unfavorable reports are **HB 623** (*See RSC 3*) which would have added victim and witness intimidation to the list of aggravating circumstances in capital cases, and **HB 1559** (*See RSC 3*) which would have prohibited the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals from assigning a former judge to sit temporarily in a case where a death penalty is sought.

At *RSC's* deadline **HB 1111/SB 614**, which would create a Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment to study the death penalty (*See RSC 3*), have received favorable reports from both Judicial Proceedings and the Judiciary Committee and were heading toward a vote.. Proponents of repeal are questioning the need for another study, given that at least three (including that of LWVMD) have been conducted in the past six years. The MDCASE coalition (Maryland Committee Against State Executions), of which LWVMD is a member, is urging passage, however, in the hope that Maryland might eventually follow New Jersey in repealing the death penalty. A similar study preceded the New Jersey vote. Should the study bill pass, *RSC* will report in full on its contents in the next issue.

*Marcia Reinke*

## MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES

The three bills dealing with transit vehicles assaults have all received unfavorable reports. **HBs 322, 323, and 324**, all stemming from an assault on a Baltimore City bus (*See RSC 2 and 3*) would have resulted in mandatory sentences of 15 years for assault on a passenger, 30 days for malicious destruction of transit property, and 20 years for assault on the driver.

These bills were not alone in getting unfavorable reports. All the other bills *RSC* has been following this year have been reported unfavorably by Judicial Proceedings and/or Judiciary. LWVMD is generally opposed to mandatory minimum sentences, believing instead in judicial discretion.

*Marcia Reinke*

## GUNS

By a vote of 29-17, the Senate has passed **SB 42**, which would allow a judge to require defendants in temporary protective order cases to surrender their firearms (*See RSC 2*). There has been no action in the House on the cross-filed bill, **HB 640**, nor on several similar bills filed in both chambers, in apparent deference to SB 42. Designed to shield abused women, the bill is opposed by those who argue it is an unwarranted infringement of a person's constitutional right to bear arms. *See also Domestic Violence.*

The other major gun control bill wending its way through the legislative process is **HB 900/SB 642**, which would prohibit a District Court commissioner from authorizing pretrial release of a defendant charged with a firearms offense, if the defendant has previously been convicted in a gun-related case. (*See RSC 2*). Passed 137-0 in Third Reading, the bill is one of several filed by the Baltimore City delegation in an effort at cutting gun crimes in the city. Another such bill, **HB 964 /SB 558**, would reduce or eliminate good behavior credits for those convicted of gun crimes. It received a favorable report from Judiciary, but was then recommitted to the Committee by its chief sponsor, and the hearing on the cross-file was cancelled in the Senate.

The remainder of the 33 bills filed in the “Guns” category, have either been withdrawn, received unfavorable reports or are stalled without action.

Of great interest to those interested in Maryland gun laws is the case just heard by the U.S. Supreme Court involving gun control in Washington D.C. and the Constitution’s Second Amendment. A decision is expected in June.

*Marcia Reinke*

## CORRECTIONS

A trio of bills which would provide more education, training and incentives for Maryland’s prison inmates remain alive at *RSC’s* deadline. **SB 145**, which would remove a prohibition against the sale of services by Maryland Correctional Enterprises and authorize the sale of goods to individuals employed by the State, (*See RSC 1*) received a favorable report from Judicial Proceedings, has passed to Third Reading in the Senate (42-5) and awaits action in the House, where a hearing is scheduled March 26.

**HB 744**, which would allow Maryland Correctional Enterprises to develop specified training programs in construction and construction-related services (*See RSC 3*), received a favorable report from Health and Government Operations, passed Third Reading in the House, (136 – 0) and awaits Senate action.

**HB 367/SB 203** which call for a major restructuring of how Maryland provides education and literacy services to adults, and educational and training programs in correctional facilities (*See RSC 3*) have been referred respectively to the Senate Committees on Finance, Education, Health and Environmental Affairs, and to House Committees on Economic Matters and Ways and Means where hearings have not yet been scheduled. These 26-page bills, filed by the Administration, would transfer responsibility from the K-12 Education Department into a state workforce development agency under the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

The problems with the budget noted in *RSC 3* have not changed. The emphasis on juvenile institutions continues, with no money for concentrated therapeutic services, such as Multi Systemic Therapy. This therapy has been shown to cut recidivism and provide rehabilitation for youth at much lower cost than institutionalization. The budget’s emphasis on physical plant can result in some positive progress for juveniles if the facilities are upgraded so that the youths are living in a better physical environment.

**HB 622 (RSC 2) Evidence - Based Practices for Delinquent Youth** remains in committee and lacks a cross-file in the Senate. Our positions on individually designed treatment programs for juvenile offenders and specialized counseling services support this bill.

**SB 441 (Frosh and 8 others) (RSC 2)/HB 1332 (RSC 3) (Dumais)** sets up a sexual offender registry for youth who are adjudicated delinquent for committing acts, at age 13 or older, that would have been a sexual crime if committed by an adult. During hearings, law enforcement favored the bill, but questions were raised about the standards to be used in determining the possibility of re-offending. SB 441 was reported favorably and has

passed the senate. HB 1332 has been assigned to committee, a hearing has been held, but no votes have been taken.

**HB 1322** (RSC 3) (Sophocles) crossfiled with **SB 634** (Sen. Jacobs and 4 others) sends youth age 16 and above who commit certain crimes as members of a gang to adult court for trial. At the House Judicial Proceedings committee hearing, the States Attorney from Harford County stated that the reason for the bill was the proliferation of gangs in his county. The Public Defender of Harford County who opposed the bill pointed out the danger of sending youth to adult prisons, where they are likely to be victimized and are deprived of any chance of rehabilitation. In the past, the League has testified against bills that mandate moving juveniles to adult court.

**HB 1240** (Del. Frush) allows a Juvenile Court judge to order a youth judged delinquent to be placed in an alternative education program, if one exists, in the juvenile's county of residence. This bill has been sent to the House with a favorable report. The bill has also been filed in the Senate and will be heard on 3/26, in the Education, Health and Environmental Matters Committee.

**HB75** regarding notification of private school principals when students are arrested for certain reportable offences, has passed the House and is now in the Senate, cross-filed as SB238 (Sen. Stone and 10 others).

**HB 392** allowing minors to consent to drug and mental health screenings, was withdrawn after receiving an unfavorable report from JPR.

Debbie Ehrenstein

## COURTS

Lots of action during these past three weeks mostly unfavorable committee reports however **SB 403** (Stone) **Jury Trials in Civil Actions** received a favorable JPR committee report on March 21 with an amendment to reduce the amount in controversy from the proposed \$20,000 to \$15,000. Current law is \$10,000 and a party may not demand a jury trial. **HB 642** (RSC 2) a cross file has seen no action hearing 2/20.

**SB 404** (Stone) **Constitutional Amendment Civil Jury Trials - Amount in Controversy** received a favorable JPR report after its hearing on 3/12. The committee also amended the amount to \$15,000. Special ordered 3/24.

**SB 514** (Dept. Legislative Services - State Board of Law Examiners) -**Sunset Extension and Program Evaluation** passed the Senate 40 – 5 on 3/10 after the defeat of two floor amendments. This legislation proposes to raise the bar examination fee from the current \$150 to \$400. The House JUD hearing is 3/25. **HB 771**, the cross filed passed the House 137-0 on 3/3 with the proposed bar exam fee at \$250. No Senate action on the House Bill.

Receiving unfavorable committee reports: **HB 1275** (RSC 3) **Circuit Court Judges - Election and Terms of Office** (3/19); **HB 1102** (RSC 4) **Election Law Information from Courts** (3/21); **HB 1069 Jury Duty Payment** (3/17)

Grace Kubofcik

## BASIC HUMAN NEEDS - HOUSING

The House passed 3 of the Administration's 4 bills on foreclosures, and passage in the Senate appears likely.

**HB 360 (RSC 3) Maryland Mortgage Fraud Protection Act** (The Speaker et al for the administration)

**HB 363 (RSC 3) Credit regulation - mortgage lending and other extensions of credit** (The Speaker et al for the administration)

**HB 365 (RSC 3) Recordation of instruments securing mortgage loans and foreclosure of mortgages and deeds of trust on residential property** (The Speaker et al for the administration)

Data released by the Department of Housing and Community Development shows foreclosures continued to rise in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2007. The number of mortgage loan defaults grew 53.2% in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter alone. Five jurisdictions - Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, Prince George's Counties, and Baltimore City - accounted for 72.2% of foreclosures in the state, and nearly every jurisdiction experienced an increase in foreclosure activity. The problem is only likely to deepen in 2008, as subprime adjustable rate mortgage resets are expected to peak this year.

Ruth Crystal

## CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

### Previously Reported Bills

Four bills have passed the House and will be heard by EHEA on March 27: **HB 138 (RSC 1)**, Ballot issue Committee; **HB 153 (RSC 1)**, Slate Disbursements; **HB 296 (RSC 2)**, Attribution and Receipt of Contributions (reporting); and **HB 544 (RSC 2)**, Debit Card Disbursements.

**HB 1432** - Affidavit and Signature, and **HB 1460** - Loans to Candidates (*RSC 4*), were favorably reported by W&M.

**HB 347 (RSC 2 and 3)**, Special Session fundraising was withdrawn by its sponsor.

The League submitted testimony to EHEA on 3/19 supporting HB 473, Attribution of Contributions (LLC's).

There has been no further action since RSC # 4 on **HB 971/SB 593**, Public Funding of GA Campaigns, **SB 245**, Attribution of Contributions (LLC's), or **SB 423**, Ballot Issue Committee.

Kay Terry

## ETHICS

No further action on **SB 190** and **191** since RSC # 4.

Kay Terry

## TRANSPORTATION

### Updates:

RSC2 – **SB204/HB373 Transit-Oriented Development** passed the House with an amendment that this act does not give the State authority to supersede local land use and planning authority.

RSC4 – **HB1185 Public Transit Services – Efficiency and Performance Standards** has been favorably recommended by Ways & Means, amended to require 35% farebox recovery, down from the current 50%.

A bill, that has received a great deal of attention, authorizing electronic speed monitoring throughout the State passed both the House and the Senate. **SB269/HB364 Vehicle Laws – Speed Monitoring Systems – Statewide authorization and Use in Highway Work Zones.**

## AIR QUALITY

### Update:

RSC2 – **SB 309/HB 712 – Global Warming Solutions** passed the Senate with two amendments that gut the purpose of the bill, i.e. to make the State a leader in reducing greenhouse gases. One says that provisions of federal law will prevail where state standards differ; the other requires that all regulations to implement the bill be passed by the General Assembly. Further, 90% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 becomes a target not a mandate. The establishment of an Office of Climate Change is omitted, leaving implementation with the existing Air and Radiation Management Administration within the Department of the Environment.

A package of four specific bills from the administration addressing energy issues has been heard. The Maryland Commission on Climate Change [www.mdclimatechange.us](http://www.mdclimatechange.us) reports that 38% of greenhouse gas generation in Maryland is attributable to electricity consumption and 32% to transportation.

**SB2 68/HB 368 (EHEA, ECM) Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative – Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Program** repeals the Maryland Renewable Energy Fund and redirects proceeds from the sale of cap and trade allowances to a new fund. The monies are to be used to decrease energy demand, to promote energy efficiency and to increase clean energy sources. This is a part of implementing the regional agreement. No action in either house.

**SB 209/HB375 (FIN, ECM) Renewable Portfolio Standards Percentage Requirements – Acceleration** increases the percentage of renewable energy sources required to be used by electric utilities up to 20% by 2022. No action yet.

**SB205/HB 374 (FIN, ECM) EmPOWER Maryland Energy Efficiency Act of 2008** sets a goal of 15% reduction in per capita electricity consumption and peak demand by 2015. It directs electric utilities to educate consumers on conservation and provide incentives to accomplish the goal. No action yet.

**SB207/HB377 (B&T and FIN, ECM and W&M) Solar and Geothermal Tax Incentive and Grant Program** increases limits for residential and non-residential properties under a program established in 2004, which extends property and sales tax exemptions as well as grants for solar and geothermal equipment. Passed the house.

Carol Filipczak



## ELECTIONS

**HB 310 – Voter Registration and Voting Age**, sponsored by Delegates Rosenberg and Cardin passed the House on Third Reading (136 – 0) with amendments. As amended, this legislation no longer requires a Constitutional amendment, and would allow citizens who are at least 16 years old to register to vote. Additionally, this legislation clears up the confusion for young voters that was evident in our February primary elections by specifying that voters under the age of 18 years may vote in a primary election in which candidates are nominated for a general or special election that will occur when the voter is 18 years old, and that an under-18 voter may not vote in any other election. A hearing is scheduled on March 27<sup>th</sup> in the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.

An amended **HB 102 – Voter’s Right Protection Act of 2008**, sponsored by Delegate Rosenberg and 13 other delegates, has passed the House on Third Reader (97-38). This lengthy legislation would accomplish several things: allow a voter to vote a provisional ballot if a Chief Election Judge determines that there is a problem outside the voter’s control that causes the voter to be unable to vote a regular ballot (this is in addition to the normal reasons a voter is allowed to vote a provisional ballot); require the State Board of Election to ensure that judges’ training include detailed instruction on the duties and limitations of election judges; require that election judges be trained to operate the voting system, including features for disabled voters; and require that if a polling place is closed for more than one hour during voting hours, the election judges must keep that polling place open an additional amount of time equal to the amount the polling place was closed, not to exceed 2 hours. The bill also prohibits any person, organization or campaign entity from distributing or publishing campaign material that contains false information relating to the time, place or manner of an election or the qualifications or restriction on voter eligibility. Originally, the bill would have prohibited the dissemination of campaign material that falsely related to an endorsement or political affiliation of a candidate, but those sections were amended out of the legislation. The bill also clarifies some of the restrictions on activities of challengers and watchers at the polling place. There has been no action in the Senate on this bill, or the cross-filed SB 54.

A number of bills received an unfavorable report by the House Ways & Means Committee after hearings on March 18<sup>th</sup>, including:

**HB 1103 (RSC 3)** – Periodic Review of Statewide Voter Registration List

**HB 884 (RSC 3)** - Voter Verification and Fairness Act – would have required proof of citizenship when registering to vote

**HB 1199 (RSC 3)** - Voting Procedures – Identification – would have required a photo ID or affidavit when voting

**HB 1288 (RSC 4)** - Voting Procedures – Identification – would have required a photo ID to vote

Senate legislation requiring a voter to show government issued photo ID to vote, **SB 136 - Qualification of Voters - Proof of Identity**, had a hearing on February 14<sup>th</sup>, but there has been no further action. Nor has there been any action taken on **HB 1291 - Prerecorded Phone Messages - Sponsor Identification**, that would require automated political telephone calls (“robo” calls) to contain a sponsor identification. This bill was heard March 18<sup>th</sup> in the House Ways & Means Committee.

The League submitted testimony in opposition to all the legislation requiring tighter restrictions on identification of voters at the polling place or the requirement to prove citizenship when registering.

Lu Pierson

## EDUCATION

Although crossover day has passed, more than half of the House Education bills described in previous RSCs have not been acted on by the Ways and Means Committee, and several Senate bills also are awaiting action. Current status of all other bills is noted below.

### RSC 1

SB 50 - Spec. Ed Services - Children in a Home School Setting - Passed Senate  
SB 77 - Children in Informal Kinship Care Relationships - Passed Senate  
SB 78 - TF to Study System Variables on Student Achievement - Unfavorable Report  
SB 96 - Truancy Rates - Positive Behavioral Interventions and Behavior Modification Programs - Passed Senate with amendments that narrow the behavior modification program required

### RSC 2

SB 158 - Farm to School Program - Passed Senate with minor amendments  
SB 229 - Classroom Instruction Expenditures - Required Funding - Unfavorable Report  
SB 264 - High School Dropouts - Alternative Programs and GED Requirements - Passed Senate with amendment stating student's intent to leave school is also a time when GED and alternative programs info must be given  
SB 436 - Compulsory Attendance Age - Passed Second Reader with amendments increasing the compulsory attendance age to 17 rather than 18 and delaying implementation to the 2010-11 school year if \$45 million is budgeted for implementation  
SB 447 - GED Options Program - Unfavorable Report  
HB 139 - Multiple Suspensions - Passed Second Reader with amendments that create a task force to study issues related to multiple suspensions; lists membership and areas of study especially related to student service teams for these students  
HB 169 - Children in Informal Kinship Relationships - Passed House  
HB 185 - Parental choice Scholarship Program - Unfavorable Report  
HB 186 - Great Schools Tax Credit Program - Unfavorable Report  
HB 188 - Smart Start Scholarship Program - Unfavorable Report  
HB 199 - Bullying Harassment and Intimidations - Passed Second Reader with amendments that delete the original bill, add bullying to existing law on intimidation and harassment, and require the State Board of Education to develop a model policy and county school boards to establish policies prohibiting these three kinds of acts  
HB 300 - Public and Private Schools - Criminal Law courses - Unfavorable Report  
HB 403 - Obesity in School-Age Children - Withdrawn  
HB 465 - Public charter School Revisions - Withdrawn  
HB 696 - Farm to School Program - Passed House with same minor amendments as SB 158

### RSC 3

SB 519 - Student Victim of a Crime - Offender Required to Change Schools - Unfavorable Report  
SB 582 - Multiple Suspensions - Unfavorable Report  
SB 714 - Financial Literacy Curriculum - Unfavorable Report  
SB 773 - Adult Education and Family Literacy Services - Passed Second Reader  
HB738 - State Aid - Full-time Equivalent Enrollment - Unfavorable Report  
HB 920 - Student Victim of a Crime - Offender required to Change Schools - Withdrawn  
HB 953 - Alternative Programs and GED Requirements - Passed House with amendment clarifying that it applies only prospectively to students who drop out  
HB 1158 - Safe Schools Reporting Act - Passed Second Reader with an amendment changing effective date to July 1, 2008 and deleting reference to sunset repeal  
HB 1209 - Safe Schools Reporting Act - Sunset Repeal - Passed Second Reader  
HB1242 - Task Force to Improve Financial Literacy - Passed House with amendments modifying membership and adding to required areas of study.

Lois Stoner

## HEALTH

It seems that health legislation is having some momentum, although a number of proposals have either been withdrawn or have received an unfavorable report in committee. Several House bills will have hearings in the Senate Finance Committee including **HB 29** on discrimination based on genetic information and **HB 216** on hereditary and congenital screening. **HB 238** re: Maryland Health Insurance Plan and **HB 289** on the task force on health care access will have hearings in the Senate Finance Committee on 3/26. **SB 286** on hospital infections was recently heard in the House Health and Government Operations Committee. **SB 309** on global warming and greenhouse gases has passed its 2<sup>nd</sup> reading in the House with amendments that may restrict most of the regulatory functions that were in the original proposal.

## CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**HB 1319/SB 912 – Expanding early childhood education** ( Tom Hucker/ Roy Dyson) makes children of military families eligible for public pre-kindergarten, currently only available to children receiving free and reduced meals (FARMS). LWVMD wrote letter of support to Committee chairmen, in cooperation with MD Committee for Children.. Hrng. 2/18/08, House and Senate. No action.

**HB 1391 - KIDS FIRST- Health Care Coverage for all** (Mizeur et al) asks Comptroller, based on tax returns, to help in finding eligible children and get them enrolled. Hrg, 3/13/08. No further action yet.

**HB 40/SB 344 – Flexible Leave Act** (Doory et al/ Garagiola et al) would enable workers to use their already accrued sick leave to care not only for themselves, but also for their child, spouse or parent. House - 3RD reading, 3/20/08, passed w/amendments. 91-45. Senate, 3<sup>rd</sup> reading, passed w/amendments, 30-17.

**SPECIAL FLASH!** The Children’s Defense Fund has announced that they will be featured on a special broadcast of “American Idol”, on April – “Idol Gives Back”, highlighting CDF’s work with children and young people nationwide and beyond. This fundraiser will raise funds to help the millions of children born into poverty every year.

Pat Plunkett