

MFRW LEGISLATIVE REPORT – SPRING BOARD MEETING – April 24, 2021 – by Ella Ennis

The 2021 Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly was like no other. The public was not allowed in the State House or Legislative buildings or to attend hearings on legislation in person. The House of Delegates was divided into 2 groups with half meeting in the House Chamber and half meeting in the Annex in the House Office Building. Members in the Annex had only one microphone from which to speak on the floor - very awkward and less than equal with the members seated in the House Chamber. The Senate was sequestered into individual plexiglass cubes. The opportunities to weigh-in on legislation was very limited. All oral Committee testimony was via Zoom video. One had to sign up at the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website two work days prior to the hearing in order to testify orally or to submit written testimony. Of the 2,359 bills introduced, 817 passed both chambers.

Even under these difficult circumstances, members of the MFRW did a fantastic job of offering rational, focused testimony on numerous bills. Numerous clubs kept their members apprised of the progress of legislation and called on them to send e-mails and make phone calls on some of these issues. Our MFRW President Diana Waterman testified and supported our efforts. Thank you so very much to everyone who participated in our legislative efforts.

This year the tenor of many bills was sharply left-leaning activism with claims of racism, sexism and bias in everything from law enforcement procedures and protections; to voting and elections, immigrant issues, environmental issues, health and education programs and environmental programs.

The Legislature passed the largest budget in Maryland history with major portion of funding coming from Federal sources connected to the COVID 19 Federal rescue packages. The problem may come next year when those extra Federal funds disappear.

While the Legislature cannot currently directly add new items to the State budget, they continue to add new items by placing funding mandates in legislation they pass. Approximately 85% of the state budget is mandated spending that the Governor cannot reduce.

Here is a brief recap of some of the major legislation passed this session:

2020 Veto Overrides:

Education- Early in Session General Assembly overrode the 2020 Veto of the Blueprint of Maryland's Future – Kirwan Commission 10-year Education Expansion Program. In the 2021 Session they passed **HB 1372** – Makes revisions to the funding formulas and time frames for implementing the Blueprint due to the pandemic and virtual teaching.

The General Assembly also overrode the Governor's vetoes of crime related legislation passed in 2020.

2021 Crimes & Law Enforcement "Reform" Bills – Vetoed by Governor and Overridden by General Assembly.

HB 670 – Repeals the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights. Sets Police Discipline and Law Enforcement Programs and development of training and Procedures.

SB 71 – Requirements for Body-Worn Cameras, Employee Programs & Use of Force.

SB 494 -Juveniles convicted as adults cannot be sentenced to Life without Parole. Those previously sentenced can apply for review and reduction of sentence repeatedly – impacting families of victims to relive the tragedy over again.

SB 178 – Administrative or criminal investigation of misconduct by law enforcement officer, including an internal affairs investigatory record is not a personnel record for Public Information Act disclosure unless part of an ongoing investigation or prosecution.

Other crime related bills awaiting the Governor’s action.

SB 600 – Office of State Prosecutor to investigate and prosecute deaths caused by Police Officers.

SB 420 -Legalizing possession, manufacturing and transfer or sale of drug paraphernalia.

Immigration Enforcement

HB 15 – and **SB 85** – Establish Governor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs to create a network of neighborhood-based centers to assist with immigration status, DACA & naturalizations matters, assist law enforcement in combatting crimes against immigrants & promote civic & economic participation by immigrants.

HB 16 – Prohibit State or local agreements from facilitating immigration-related detention by private entities and prohibiting state or local government entities from approving zoning variances for buildings to house immigration-related detainees.

HB 23 -Prohibiting State/local law enforcement from sharing databases or digital images with Federal Immigration officials without a judicial warrant. However, these same databases available to insurance companies and private detectives for their commercial investigatory purposes.

Health Related Bills

HB 130 – Establish a Commission on LGBTQ Affairs in the Office of the Governor. Originally the bill stated the purpose of the Commission was to “work” with local governments to pass LGBTQ inclusive laws. The words were amended but the intent remains. The Commission will “offer testimony on issues concerning women and LGBYQ persons before legislative and administrative bodies and make an annual report that includes recommendations on policies for LGBTQ adults and youth that work to end discriminatory practices in this state.” The Commission may seek private funds in addition to state funding. A proposed amendment to exempt girls’ sports from this Commission’s charter was rejected. The Commission could seek to have girls’ sports include transgender girls (biological males) in high schools and colleges. There is a strong push to allow minor children identified as having gender dysphoria to take puberty blockers and opposite sex hormones to help permanently “trans” them to the

opposite sex. The brain is still developing until about age 25. Young people are very easily influenced and change their minds frequently. Children under 18 should not be able to take life-altering drugs or have sex transition surgery.

SB41 – Reduces the age from 16 to 12 that a minor is mature enough to consent to consultation, diagnosis and treatment for mental or emotional disorders. Health care providers can withhold information from a parent if provider thinks disclosure could deter the minor from seeking care. This will include care for “gender dysphoria.

HB 135 and SB 84 allows a pharmacist to administer “maintenance injectable medication” that is not a biological product and that is administered by injection other than intravenously for a chronic need, condition or disorder including treatment of a psychiatric disorder or substance use disorder, contraception and vitamins. The bill is silent on whether minors can access these services without parental consent.

HB 28 and SB 5 – Requires the Office of Minority Health Disparities to publish race & ethnicity data on the Maryland Department of Health Website every 6 months, The Bill requires an applicant renewing a license or certificate issued by a health occupations board to complete an approved program on “implicit bias” training for bias of prejudicial negative feelings or beliefs about a group that an individual holds without being aware of the feelings or beliefs; and unconscious attributes of particular qualities to a member of a specific social group that are influenced by experience and based on learned associations between various qualities and social categories, including race and gender. Similar anti-bias training and testing is included in the law enforcement “reform” legislation.

Elections and Voting

HB 1048 and SB 683 – Establishes procedures for a Permanent Absentee Ballot List and information requirements and guidance for ballot drop boxes. Bill requires a voter to request to be placed on the Permanent Absentee Ballot List.

HB 206 and SB 596 – Early Voting to take place from the 2nd Thursday before Election Day to the Thursday before Election Day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily for all elections.

HB 745 – The number of Early Voting Centers increased to 1 for counties with 50,000 or fewer voters; 2 for counties with 50,000 to 100,000 voters and up to 13 for counties with 600,000 or more voters. A county can choose to add 1 additional Early Voting site if needed.

SB415 – Provides State Budget Mandate of at least \$4 million a year for public financing of elections for Governor and details requirements for eligible contributions for qualifying for funding.

SB 55 – Requirements for residency – place of abode to serve as a Senator or Delegate.