

Delegate Addie Eckardt's Legislative Wrap Up March 4, 2010

This week the following bills have passed the House of Delegates and will move on to the Senate for action. HB451 passed and specifies that in Dorchester County an unpaid bay restoration fee is a lien against the property on which the wastewater facility, onsite sewage disposal (septic) system, or sewage holding tank is located. A notice of lien must be recorded in the county's land records. Currently there is no mechanism to collect the fee if citizens do not pay it. These funds are used for Sewer/Wastewater Treatment upgrades and for replacement systems using the newest technology for failing septic systems.

HB 113 passed and adds an additional member to the Dorchester County Sanitation District representing the new Woolford, Madison, Susquehanna Sanitary district.

HB218 passed and allows watermen harvesting oysters to use a devil diver or devil catcher as part of their equipment.

HB 1059 will be heard in the Environmental Matters Committee on Friday and will eliminate the prohibition of soft shell clam harvesting in the Choptank River in Dorchester 30 days before and through the end of the wild waterfowl hunting season.

The House Economic Matters Committee will continue to hear local liquor bills including HB1056 that decreases to 50, the number of seats in restaurants in Dorchester County required to obtain a beer, wine and liquor licenses.

Pensions

Two new resolutions HJ11 and HJ12 have been introduced and will be heard in the House Appropriations Committee. I also have the same suggestions in the form of amendments to be added to the SJ5 resolution (the Senate counterpart to HJ5) when it is heard. HJ11 prospectively, offers an optional defined contribution plan for legislators while retaining all accrued benefits to date and HJ12 prospectively moves all legislators into the State employees' retirement plan while retaining all accrued benefits to date.

Texting While Driving

Current law prohibits writing or sending a text message while driving, but does not address reading text messages. [HB 192](#) extends existing law so that drivers may not read a text message while driving. The prohibitions on texting do not apply to using a global positioning system (GPS) or contacting a 9-1-1 emergency system. A total of 19 states and the District of Columbia ban texting while driving. Violation of [HB 192](#) is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of \$500.

Speed Cameras

[HB 143](#) (failed), which would have required that speed cameras record images of vehicles speeding through work zones if a worker was present, was voted down in committee.

Transportation Trust Fund (TTF)

[HB 383](#), the Transportation Trust Fund Protection Act, prohibits the transfer of money in the TTF to the general fund unless the Governor declares the transfer necessary due to extraordinary financial circumstances, and legislation enacted prior to the transfer provides for repayment of the funds within five years after the diversion, with repayment commencing immediately.