



# The Legislative Wrap-Up

Library and Information Services, Department of Legislative Services

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## CONCURRENCE OR CONFERENCE

As the 2003 session nears *sine die* on Monday at midnight, many bills will reach the concurrence or conference portion of Maryland's legislative process.

If the second chamber amends a bill, the bill is returned to the chamber of origin, where the committee that originally considered the measure may recommend to accept or reject the amendments. If the committee chairman moves to concur in the other chamber's amendments and the motion is adopted, then a final roll call vote on the bill (as amended) is taken in the chamber of origin. If the bill passes, it has completed the legislative process and is printed as an "enrolled" bill.

If the chairman moves not to concur in the amendments from the opposite chamber and the motion is adopted, then a message usually requests the opposite chamber to recede from the amendments or to appoint a conference committee. After consultation with the committee chairman, the presiding officer then names 3 conferees from the chamber of origin.

If the chamber of origin rejects the amendments, the committee in the opposite chamber considers whether to recede from the amendments. If the committee refuses to recede, the presiding officer of the second chamber also appoints 3 conferees.

For the conference committee to deliver a report, at least 4 of the 6 members must agree on the proposed version of the bill. If agreement cannot be reached, then the bill dies. If no conference committee is appointed, or if the conference committee fails to meet, the bill dies. Alternatively, the presiding officers may request that the conference committee meet again, or they may appoint a new conference committee on the bill.

If the conference committee reports a proposal, then each chamber votes either to accept the report without change or to reject it. Following adoption of the conference report, the bill, as amended by the conference committee, must be approved by a majority of the total membership in a roll call or recorded vote. At this point an "enrolled" bill is printed, reflecting any changes made by the conference committee.

## AGRICULTURE AND SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

The General Assembly has approved proposals ([SB 367/HB 547](#)) to establish a Task Force on the Marketing of Grain and Other Agricultural Products. The task force will evaluate options and develop strategies for marketing grain (particularly soybeans) and other products, as well as examine the feasibility of reestablishing a grain export facility and establishing new transportation options from alternative locations in central Maryland.

Other companion bills moving through the legislature consolidate the State's rural capacity development programs, including the Forum for Rural Maryland and the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF). [SB 744/HB 1147](#) rename the Forum as the Maryland Rural Council, relocate the council from the Department of Business and Economic Development to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, and repeal the 2004 termination date for MAERDAF. The consolidation is aimed at allowing rural communities to take better advantage of opportunities available through the federal Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. [SB 744](#) has passed and [HB 1147](#) is in the Senate.

Also advancing in both chambers, companions [SB 626/HB 805](#) concern the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF). The bills provide that farm- and forest-related uses and home occupations, as determined by MALPF, may be allowed on land subject to a MALPF easement. The legislation also modifies current lot exclusion policy to give landowners additional choices in the disposition of lot rights. The Senate approved [HB 805](#), and [SB 626](#) passed second reading in the House.

Gaining preliminary approval in the Senate, [HB 91](#) allows the continuation of natural gas mining in Allegany and Garrett counties on property that becomes part of an agricultural district under MALPF. The bill also requires MALPF to determine that the continued mining of natural gas would not interfere with an agricultural operation on the property and to report on the impact. Similar bills have passed in previous years, but were vetoed.

The Senate passed [HB 344](#) that authorizes the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) to levy oyster repletion fees and to regulate all oyster dredging, not just dredging with handscrapes. In 1982, Virginia enacted similar legislation to expand the authority of the PRFC, but that expansion requires action by both states to become effective. The companion bill, [SB 248](#), passed a preliminary vote in the House.

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## COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

[SB 4/HB 18](#) won final legislative approval recently. The now-identical bills increase the maximum amount of small claims suits in District Court from \$2,500 to \$5,000. In addition, the bills:

- grant concurrent jurisdiction to the District Court and circuit court over civil cases where the amount in controversy is over \$5,000;
- increase from \$1,000 to \$2,500 the amount in District Court civil actions below which there are no formal pleadings; and
- increase from \$2,500 to \$5,000 the amount above which an appeal must be heard based on the District Court record rather than *de novo*.

[HB 113](#), which would have granted immunity from civil liability to a SLAPP suit defendant, failed a Senate committee vote. A SLAPP (“strategic lawsuit against public participation”) suit is a lawsuit that is brought in bad faith, is materially related to the defendant’s communication with a government agency or to the public at large, and is intended to inhibit the exercise of free speech rights. The bill also would have allowed the defendant to move to dismiss the SLAPP suit or to move to stay all court proceedings until the matter about which the defendant communicated is resolved.

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## CRIMINAL MATTERS AND CORRECTIONS

Bills passing the General Assembly this week and on their way to the Governor include:

- [SB 453](#), to expand the list of crimes for which a prosecutor may not use evidence relating to a victim’s reputation for chastity and to prohibit, in prosecutions of these crimes, the use of evidence relating to the victim’s reputation for abstinence

(The Senate amended and passed identical companion [HB 196](#));

- [SB 282/HB 49](#), to subject drivers not paying for gas after dispensing it into their car’s fuel tank to the suspension of their drivers’ license for up to 30 days for a first offense and a mandatory 30-day suspension for subsequent offenses; and
- [SB 135/HB 598](#), to increase the maximum fine from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for felony identity fraud, which occurs when the value of the item gotten through the identity fraud scheme is \$500 or greater, or when the intent is to manufacture, distribute, or dispense another individual’s personal identifying information without the person’s consent.

The Senate gave preliminary approval with no amendments to [HB 233](#), a bill to allow the extension of a criminal’s probation period for an additional 5 years in the circuit court or an additional 3 years in the District Court if the extension is only for making restitution, eliminating the requirement that the defendant consent in writing to the extension. The court may grant an even longer extension for making restitution if the defendant consents in writing.

[SB 133/HB 588](#) increase the maximum prison time that an abuser could earn for causing severe physical injury to a child or sexually abusing a child. The bills, each passed in identical form and now under consideration in the opposite chamber, establish the crimes of 1<sup>st</sup> degree child abuse, with a maximum penalty of 25 years in jail or 30 years if the abuse results in the child’s death, and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree child abuse, with a maximum penalty of 15 years. Current law gives a maximum of 15 years in jail to the abuser, no matter how serious the abuse, unless the child dies from the abuse, in which case the maximum sentence is 30 years. The bills increase the maximum penalty for child sexual abuse from 15 years to 25 years in jail.

A Senate committee killed a proposal that would have granted offenders who were convicted of manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, or possessing a controlled dangerous substance an increase from 5 to 10 diminution credits per month ([HB 110](#)). Volume drug dealers, drug kingpins, and 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time narcotic or hallucinatory drug offenders would have been excluded.

## ECONOMIC, BUSINESS, AND CONSUMER ISSUES

Headed to the Governor's desk is legislation repealing a requirement that a credit grantor give notice to a borrower when the grantor amends an agreement governing a revolving credit plan, if the amendment alters the computation of certain fees ([SB 179/HB 331](#)).

If the Governor agrees with the legislature, [HB 889](#) will require tobacco product manufacturers whose cigarettes are sold in the State, whether directly or through a distributor, retailer, or similar intermediary, to periodically submit certifications, reports, and notices about its brand families to the Attorney General, who will be charged with maintaining a directory of cigarettes approved for stamping and sale.

Also, if [SB 51](#) becomes law, the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority will be authorized to utilize its Guaranty Fund to guarantee up to 80% of the principal and interest of a long-term loan made by a financial institution to an applicant to refinance the applicant's existing debt.

Legislation requiring holders of property subject to the abandoned property law to provide written notice by first-class mail to owners not more than 120 days or less than 30 days before filing a report has also passed the General Assembly. Under [HB 201](#), property will be considered abandoned if an owner fails to respond to the notice within 30 days. The bill also clarifies that in some cases the notice requirement applies to banking or financial organizations or business associations.

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## EDUCATION

Two charter school bills are moving toward the conference committee stage of the legislative process. Similar bills were introduced last session, but conference committees failed to reach agreement. This session, the House amended and passed [SB 75](#) that now contains the language that was found in [HB 859](#) until the Senate amended it to contain the language of [SB 75](#). In effect, each chamber amended the other's bill to contain the language of its third reading version.

As amended and passed by the House, [SB 75](#) authorizes county boards of education to grant and revoke charters. An application to establish a public charter school may be submitted to a county board by the staff of a public school, the parents or guardians of students who attend

the public schools in the county, a public institution of higher education, or any combination of the above. If an application to establish a charter school is denied, the applicant may appeal to the State Board of Education, whose decision is final.

As amended and passed by the Senate, [HB 859](#) now provides that the primary public chartering authority for the granting of a charter is a county board of education. The secondary public chartering authority is the State Board acting in an appeal review capacity. An application may be submitted to a county board by the staff of a public school, a parent or guardian of a student who attends a public school in the county, a nonsectarian nonprofit entity, a nonsectarian institution of higher education in the State, or any combination of the above.

The Senate refused to concur with House amendments on [SB 56](#) and subsequently named its members of a conference committee. The House amendments change the bill from an emergency measure and give an honorary high school diploma to a student who withdrew from school as a junior or senior to fight in World War II, the Korean Conflict, or the Vietnam Conflict.

A Senate committee killed [HB 153](#) that would have established the Resident Teacher Corps Pilot Program as an alternative route to the teaching profession and a method for attracting career-changers to teaching.

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## ELECTIONS

Moving into the Governor's hands after final passage this week:

- [SB 40/HB 29](#) extends the termination date of the Study Commission on Public Funding of Campaigns in Maryland from June 30, 2003 to June 30, 2004;
- [SB 213](#) allows State employees who serve as election judges during hours that they are otherwise scheduled to work for the State to use 1 hour of administrative leave for each hour of service, up to a total of 8 hours for each day of service in addition to election judge compensation; and
- [SB 313](#) requires political parties to notify the State Board of Elections at least 6 months before a primary election if the party will allow voters not affiliated with it to vote in its primary election.

Amended legislation that would have closed a loophole in campaign financing laws that treat limited liability companies differently from corporations ([HB 660](#)) moved from the House to the Senate, but received an unfavorable report by the same Senate committee that killed its companion.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Companion proposals making changes in noise and pollution control efforts passed the legislature this week. [SB 320/HB 174](#) encourage local governments to consider compliance with State or local noise standards before acting on variance requests or changes in zoning.

Receiving final approval, [HB 715](#) expands existing criminal and civil penalties for violations of certain sediment erosion and control, stormwater management, tidal wetlands, and wetlands and riparian rights provisions administered by MDE. Other provisions authorize the courts to order restoration of areas unlawfully disturbed. The companion ([SB 393](#)) has preliminary approval in the opposite chamber.

Passed on second reading by the House, [SB 394](#) with amendments establishes minimum energy efficiency standards for products including ceiling fans and ceiling fan light kits, illuminated exit signs, large packaged air-conditioning equipment, and commercial clothes washers to be sold in Maryland after March 1, 2005, or installed in Maryland after January 1, 2006. Ceiling fan light kits and commercial clothes washers would not have to meet the standards until 2007 and 2008. The companion, [HB 747](#) moved to the Senate this week.

Legislation amending current penalty provisions related to asbestos removal violations advanced to preliminary approval on the House floor on Friday. [SB 95](#) removes the requirement that a civil penalty for an asbestos removal violation must have been previously assessed before a criminal sanction can apply. House amendments remove the imprisonment option for a first offense, but retain the \$20,000 maximum fine.

The Senate moved several bills toward final approval on Friday:

- [HB 39](#) provides financial assistance to residential well owners who incur the cost of adding a water treatment system to remove radium or gross alpha from their well water through a Radium Pilot Grant Program;

- [HB 794](#) enhances the reporting requirements and inspection guidelines of Maryland's hazardous liquid pipelines by requiring the Public Service Commission (PSC), in collaboration with the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, to establish and adopt methods and best practices for intrastate pipeline facilities used for the transportation of hazardous liquids. Also, the PSC must have an engineer specializing in the storage and transportation of hazardous liquid materials by pipeline on staff;
- [HB 907](#) allows nonprofit organizations that participate in an Urban and Community Forest Program or the Green Shores Program to receive financial and technical assistance from the Department of Natural Resources. The programs promote the retention and maintenance of forests and trees and promote forested buffers around the Chesapeake Bay;
- [HB 970](#) establishes a Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities within MDE to, among other things, advise State agencies on environmental justice and related community issues. The bill continues an existing commission established by executive order in 2001; and
- [HB 1051](#) changes MDE's Voluntary Cleanup Program (VCP) portion of the Brownfields initiative by exempting certain property owners and operators from the definition of a "responsible person" under the Controlled Hazardous Substances Law, by allowing a reduction of the application fee for participation in VCP under certain conditions, and by providing that a determination by MDE that it has no further requirements under VCP is transferable to subsequent purchasers under specified conditions.

A new introduction scheduled for a hearing on Friday would increase the tire recycling fee to \$2 per tire and rename the fee as the Tire Recycling and Emergency Response Fee. [HB 1184](#) also provides that the revenues be distributed between the State Used Tire Cleanup and Recycling Fund in MDE and the Low Interest Revolving Loan Account under the Volunteer Company Assistance Fund.

The Low Interest Revolving Loan Account is used to award loans to volunteer ambulance, fire, and rescue companies to assist with up to 75% of the cost of purchasing or refurbishing equipment and upgrading or replacing facilities needed to store equipment.

## FAMILY LAW

The General Assembly approved a measure to establish within the Department of Human Resources (DHR) a child support enforcement privatization pilot program and demonstration sites to compete with the privatization sites. [HB 564](#) revives programs for which authorization expired last year, although language in the FY 2003 Budget Bill extends the previous privatization pilot through June 30, 2003, and funds remain for continuation of the 4 former demonstration sites until the same date. The bill authorizes DHR to contract with a private company to perform all aspects of child support enforcement in Baltimore City and Queen Anne's County.

DHR must establish at least 4 "competing" demonstration sites by July 1, 2003 (one each in Calvert, Howard, Montgomery, and Washington counties) and must add more each year until, by July 1, 2008, there are a total of 22. DHR is also required to establish pay incentives for employees at the demonstration sites, where it has sole authority over child support enforcement functions. The provisions of the bill expire on September 30, 2009.

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## FISCAL MATTERS

The General Assembly did not pass the Budget Bill ([HB 40](#)) by Tuesday, March 31, which, as the 83<sup>rd</sup> day, was the Constitutional deadline for passage of the bill. The Governor, as required by the Constitution, issued a proclamation extending the session beyond the 90<sup>th</sup> day, if necessary, to pass the budget. During the extension, only the Budget Bill and an appropriation for the extended session may be considered. All other legislation dies at midnight on the 90<sup>th</sup> day. With final passage by both chambers, the budget becomes law without further action and may not be vetoed.

Currently, a conference committee is meeting to resolve the differences between the chambers on the Budget Bill. Other conference committees are meeting to craft compromises on additional fiscal legislation including [HB 935](#), the "Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2003" (BRFA) and [HB 753](#), "Taxes and Revenues":

- [HB 935](#) (BRFA) increases General Fund revenues for fiscal years 2003 and 2004 by transferring money from special funds to the General Fund, reallocating revenues to the General Fund, reducing certain aid amounts, and increasing several fees. The bill takes

effect June 1, 2003. The Senate added tax compliance provisions that had been in [HB 753](#) to its version of BRFA; and

- [HB 753](#), as passed by the House, includes tax compliance provisions and business tax revision provisions, as well as a significant increase in the annual reporting fee for businesses, an expansion of the insurance premium tax to health maintenance organizations, and an expansion of the transfer tax. The Senate version deletes the tax revision provisions and the transfer tax provisions, moves the tax compliance provisions to [HB 935](#), imposes a 1 year 10% corporate income tax surcharge, retains the extension of the insurance premium tax to health maintenance organizations, and increases the tax on tobacco products, other than cigarettes.

[HB 140](#), the "Maryland Consolidated Capital Bond Loan of 2003," has passed the Senate with 36 amendments. The bill is usually considered synonymous with the "consolidated capital bond bill," which finances the majority of the State's capital programs, as well as various bond bills sponsored by individual legislators. The bill sets forth the amount of State debt to be created, and details the amount to be allocated for each proposed capital project. However, unlike the operating budget, where only reductions may be made by the General Assembly, the legislature may delete capital projects proposed by the Governor, increase or decrease the amounts allocated for specific purposes of a project, or add specific projects and dollar amounts. The Governor has veto power or may exercise line-item veto of this bill.

The Senate version of [HB 140](#), which eliminates the local projects that were in the House version, authorizes State debt of \$742.5 million including:

- \$107.6 million for public school construction, an increase of \$16.7 million from the amount passed by the House;
- \$209.5 million for construction at State universities and colleges;
- \$42.6 million for construction grants to community colleges, and \$14.2 million for grants to private colleges and universities;
- \$110.2 million for environmental programs including \$36.1 million for Program Open Space, \$5 million for the Rural Legacy Program, \$21.2 million

for the Agricultural Land Preservation Program, and \$11.5 million for nutrient removal programs. (The Senate deleted the \$10 million for the Community Parks and Playground Program);

- \$105.9 million for public safety facilities; and
- \$8.7 million for the Community Legacy Program and \$6.5 million for the One Maryland Program.

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## HEALTH CARE AND INSURANCE

This week the Senate passed and sent the House bills revising the licensure and discipline of physicians in Maryland. [SB 774](#) transfers the authority to set standards for the licensure of physicians, as well as the regulation and certification of specified allied health professionals, from the Board of Physician Quality Assurance (BQPA) to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

Under [SB 500](#), the BQPA is renamed the State Board of Physicians and provision is made for the appointment of new Board members by the Governor with the advice of the Secretary of DHMH. A major element of the bill is the alteration of the standard of proof under which physicians are disciplined. Under the State's sunset evaluation law, the current medical practice act is scheduled to terminate July 1, 2003, unless legislative action is taken.

[SB 450/](#)[HB 211](#), both approved by the General Assembly, repeal the enrollment cap of 30,000 in the Short-Term Prescription Drug Subsidy Plan and permit the plan to enroll the maximum number of individuals eligible for enrollment, subject to available funds.

In other action related to provision of prescription drugs, the Senate has passed an amended [HB 143](#) that extends the June 30, 2003, termination date for the Maryland Medbank Program to June 30, 2006, and transfers the Medbank program from the Maryland Health Care Foundation to DHMH. The program assists low-income individuals who lack prescription drug coverage by accessing medically-necessary prescription drugs through patient assistance programs sponsored by pharmaceutical drug manufacturers.

Legislation related to health insurance matters also appears to be approaching final approval with hearings in the opposite chamber this week:

- [HB 1100](#) extends available coverage under the Maryland Health Insurance Plan (MHIP), a program for the medically uninsured, to individuals who are eligible under the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002. (Based on the bill's amendments, individuals who could participate in the MHIP include Bethlehem Steel retirees between the ages of 55 to 64); and
- [SB 773](#), a legislative response to the Maryland Insurance Commissioner's rejection of the proposed conversion of CareFirst to for-profit status and acquisition by WellPoint Health Networks, as amended, requires the Insurance Commissioner and the Attorney General to determine whether any conduct identified in the Commissioner's determination violates provisions of federal or State law.

A House committee heard lengthy comments and opinions early in the week on [SB 732](#) that prohibits the Maryland Health Care Commission (MHCC) from granting a statewide certificate of need for hospice care programs. The legislation seeks to protect small, locally-operated hospices from competition from large firms. Also, programs previously allowed to practice statewide would be restricted to earlier jurisdiction limits.

[SB 223](#) has passed both chambers and awaits the Governor's signature. The bill grants a mother the right to breast-feed her child in any public or private location and prohibits restrictions on breast-feeding.

The Darrell Putman Compassionate Use Act House bill has reached final passage ([HB 702](#)). The companion, [SB 502](#), was heard by a House committee this week. The bills allow evidence of medical necessity to be introduced as a mitigating factor for those being prosecuted for the use or possession of marijuana.

Legislation relating to mental health care needs has passed or is continuing to advance. These bills include:

- [HB 433](#) (includes opposite chamber amendments) establishes a Task Force on the Needs of Persons with Co-Occurring Mental Health and Substance Abuse Disorders. (The Senate changed the title to co-occurring mental "illness");
- [SB 209](#) (passed) and [HB 675](#) (includes opposite chamber amendments) require Medicaid to reimburse outpatient mental health care providers the entire amount of the Medicaid program fee for

outpatient mental health treatment given to an individual eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, including any amount ordinarily withheld as a psychiatric exclusion and any copayment not covered under Medicare. (The bills, as amended, contain the same language and require that the funds for this reimbursement come from reprioritizing existing grant funds);

- [SB 273](#) (passed)/[HB 668](#) (passed) modify requirements for petitions for emergency evaluations of individuals with mental disorders to facilitate the commitment of those who pose a danger to themselves or others;
- [HB 25](#) (includes opposite chamber amendments)/[SB 252](#) (preliminary approval by the House) sets up a Task Force to Study Access to Mental Health Services. The bills differ slightly in the task force membership.

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## HOUSING

Passing both chambers, [HB 722](#) requires a local government agency to report to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) any known property that is noncompliant with the requirements of the Reduction of Lead Risk in Housing Program.

The last remaining bill to create a Study Commission on Housing Policy ([HB 845](#)) was withdrawn this week; it called for the development of a statewide typology for the application and allocation of State housing and community development programs and resources, taking into consideration such factors as income levels and concentrations of poverty, planned rates of growth, and the availability of affordable housing.

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## SPORTS AND GAMING

Failing in a House committee, [SB 322](#) would have authorized video lottery terminals (slot machines) at racetracks at Pimlico, Laurel, Rosecroft, and at a future track in Allegany County. The committee vote was 16 against and 4 for the bill. Most observers now believe that slots will not be authorized this session.

## STATE GOVERNMENT

The Senate passed [HB 860](#) with amendments that delete the transfer to the Department of Education (MSDE) of the educational programs of the Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School, one of the juvenile facilities that Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) currently manages. A House conference committee has been named.

The Senate companion, [SB 390](#), has been amended in the same way, passed, and was before a House committee on Friday. Another Senate committee earlier had deleted the \$6.5 million appropriation in the Budget Bill ([HB 140](#)) for the transfer. The House version of the Budget Bill reduced the funding by \$2.7 million.

The original intention of the administration legislation was to respond to a recent audit of DJJ that revealed numerous problems, including very significant issues in the educational services, at the Hickey School. On a broader scale, the bill sought to reflect the Governor's juvenile services reform efforts that focused on "wraparound" services for children who come in contact with the system.

Under "A Child First Approach," children would receive a thorough needs assessment when they enter the juvenile justice system and would be provided enhanced mental health and substance abuse treatment while they are in the system. The name change from DJJ to the Department of Juvenile Services remains in the proposals.

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## TRANSPORTATION

One of the measures commonly referred to as John's Law has passed ([HB 6](#)) and the other ([SB 383](#)) is moving toward final passage. Now identical, the bills prohibit a person who has been arrested for alcohol and/or drug-related driving offenses from driving within 12 hours after being arrested. The Senate earlier removed provisions in [SB 383](#) regarding a third party being asked to take custody of the arrestee and the impoundment of the vehicle.

[SB 380/HB 94](#) will consider a conviction for a crime committed in another state or federal jurisdiction a prior offense in Maryland, when the offense if committed in Maryland would constitute a violation of this State's alcohol- and drug-related driving provisions. Subsequent offender penalties would apply under the bills. The

House bill has passed, and the Senate companion is waiting for final approval.

Now ready for the Governor's consideration, [SB 427/HB 347](#) extend the type of alcohol- and drug-related driving cases in which participation in an alcohol or drug treatment or education program approved by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is required as a condition of probation.

A House committee killed [SB 63](#) that would have prohibited a licensed driver under the age of 18 from driving with a passenger under the age of 18 for the first 6 months after the driver's license was issued. The restriction would not have applied to a passenger who is a spouse, daughter, son, or sibling of the driver.

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## UTILITIES

The House has passed a pilot program ([HB 24](#)) to authorize Prince George's or Montgomery Counties to allow a municipal corporation or the counties to act as an aggregator that purchases electricity on behalf of consumers. Aggregation allows customers to benefit from electric competition by pooling together to negotiate discounted prices. Advocates of the proposal say the result will be lower prices for residents, but others disagree. The Public Service Commission is responsible for the standards and procedures to implement the measure, which still must gain approval from the Senate.

<p><i>The Legislative Wrap-Up</i> was current as of 3:30 p.m., April 4, 2003.</p>
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