



The Legislative Wrap-Up

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STATE OF THE STATE

At noon on Thursday, January 26, in the last State of the State address of his four-year term, Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. spoke to members of the General Assembly, dignitaries, and guests assembled in the House chamber. Governor Ehrlich enumerated the accomplishments of his first three years in office and outlined his agenda for 2006.

Gubernatorial initiatives include authorizing of slots, expanding eligibility for the homeowner's tax credit, and lowering the State property tax rate. The Governor has also proposed increasing funding for K-12 and for school construction, as well as major increases for Maryland's higher education institutions.

Additionally, Ehrlich touched on the need to expand programs dealing with workforce development, drug treatment, infant mortality, and for people with disabilities. Other initiatives address medical malpractice insurance reform, long-term insurance availability, stem cell research, additional teen- driver restrictions, and increased protection from sexual offenders.

During the address, the Governor also welcomed the President of Louisiana's Jefferson Parish, Aaron Broussard, who thanked the people of Maryland for their immediate help post-Katrina. Marylanders were among the first on the scene in the parish with medical supplies, physicians, and other assistance.

VETOES AND OVERRIDES

Legislative override action continued this week on 2005 bills that:

- establish a commission to study transportation issues in Southern Maryland to report to the Governor and the General Assembly by November 1, 2006 ([SB 281](#)/Ch 14 of the Acts of 2006, effective 2/23/2006);
- authorize the placement of speed monitoring systems on certain highways in Montgomery County ([HB 443](#)/Ch 15 of the Acts of 2006, effective 2/24/06);

- allow the use of surveillance systems to enforce laws related to illegal dumping in Baltimore City ([HB 111](#)/Ch 16 of the Acts of 2006, effective 2/24/06); and
- establish in law that a person asserting that a motor vehicle is uninsured in a civil action has the burden to prove the uninsured status of the vehicle ([HB 1162](#)/Ch 17 of the Acts of 2006 effective 2/24/06).

COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

An Administration proposal ([SB 232](#)/[HB 323](#)) introduced this week restricts electronic access to public court records that contain personal information, the electronic mail address, or the place of employment of a victim or witness in a criminal, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, peace order, child in need of assistance, or child in need of supervision proceeding. Another measure, [SB 162](#) includes similar provisions. The Senate bills will have a hearing next week.

EDUCATION

[SB 146](#) establishes a Task Force on School Safety that would evaluate and make recommendations regarding methods to address and respond effectively to incidents of student violence in public schools.

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND AGRICULTURE

Two bills, [SB 154](#)/[HB 189](#), have been introduced to establish limits on the emissions of oxides of nitrogen, sulfur dioxide, mercury, and carbon dioxide from specific fossil fuel burning electricity generating facilities. Hearings are scheduled for early February. Similar bills were considered in 2005.

FISCAL MATTERS

[HB 197](#) exempts the residence of a firefighter, law enforcement officer, or a public school teacher who is a first-time homebuyer and lives in the county where the homebuyer works, from State property tax and authorizes the counties and Baltimore City to exempt the property from the county's property tax.

[SB 22/HB 35](#) and [SB 220/HB 312](#) phase-in an expansion of the military retirement income tax exemption to 100% of the income, but vary slightly in details.

[SB 216/HB 315](#) provide an income tax subtraction modification of \$1,000 for a caregiver of an individual needing long-term care if certain conditions are met. The bills have yet to be scheduled for a hearing.

GAMING, RACING, AND SPORTS

[HB 193](#) is a proposed amendment to the Maryland Constitution, which, if passed, would be subject to voter approval at the November general election. Exempting charitable organizations, the bill limits the amount of slot machines licensed in Maryland to not more than six facilities and a total of 13,000 terminals. The licenses may be granted only in areas of the State where a majority of votes were cast in favor of the amendment.

[SB 225](#) licenses up to 15,500 slot machines at four racetrack and two nonracetrack locations in the State. This bill was introduced in 2005 as [SB 205](#).

Recently heard by a committee, [SB 98](#) repeals the current statutory restrictions for thoroughbred racing in Maryland. These restrictions do not allow thoroughbred racing after 6:15 p.m., holding mile thoroughbred racing on Sundays unless held before noon and approved by the Maryland Racing Commission, and the Maryland State Fair and Agricultural Society to race on Sundays except during the State Fair.

HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH INSURANCE

Committees in both chambers reviewed the Maryland Stem Cell Research Act of 2006 ([SB 144/HB 1](#)). Provisions of the bills include funding of embryonic stem cell research with an annual budget appropriation of \$25 million, the establishment of a Stem Cell Research Commission, and a Maryland Scientific Peer Review Committee. The bills ban human cloning. Also

before two House committees, [HB 136](#) proposes State funding for biomedical research using adult or cord-blood-derived-embryonic-like (CBE) stem cells.

Administration bills introduced this week include the Maryland Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act ([SB 229/HB 306](#)), funding to increase the number of bedside nurses ([SB 230/HB 322](#)), and establishing an advance directive registry in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ([SB 236/HB 319](#)).

Reintroduced this session are bills proposing clinical trials registration ([HB 192](#)), emergency generators in assisted living facilities ([HB 204](#)), and the Clean Indoor Air Act of 2006 ([SB 298/HB 375](#)).

STATE GOVERNMENT

Clearing the Senate this week, [SB 34](#) repeals the June 30, 2006, termination date for military administrative leave for regular employees in all branches of State government who were on active duty on July 1, 2003, or called to active duty on or after July 1, 2003.

NEXT WEEK

February 3, Friday, is the Senate Bill Introduction date. Senate bills introduced after this date are referred to the Senate Rules Committee and may not be returned to the floor except by a vote of two-thirds of the Senate membership.

Legislators will continue to hold bill and budget hearings along with briefings on voter verification technologies, fiscal matters, and Constellation Energy's merger with FPL Group, the Florida Utility Company. Other briefings relate to higher global energy prices and minority business enterprise programs. The Governor's proposed capital budget bill is slated for introduction, as well.