

## Half-way Mark for the 2012 Legislative Session

The end of this week will mark the half-way point for the 2012 Session and we still have a great deal of work left to do. My committee, Environmental Matters, will have hearings Tuesday through Friday beginning at 1:00 p.m. for the next four weeks, most days the hearings will end near 7:00 p.m. We have not passed any major legislation out of Environmental Matters Committee. I continue to work on HB 149 - the moped licensing issue and HB 433 - the licensing of condominium and homeowner managers. With the passage of HB 438, the Civil Marriage Protection Act, we can finally move onto the 2013 budget and other important legislation.

### Budget/Teacher Pensions

The most controversial issue in the 2013 budget is "Teachers' Pensions." If the State passes a portion of the Teachers' pensions to the counties, the counties will need to raise taxes. However, if the State does not pass these pension obligations on, the State will need to raise taxes. Even with major cuts in Medicaid, the Geographic Cost of Education Indexing (GCEI) and Higher Education, the state budget cannot continue at the current tax rates and pay the entire cost of the teacher contributions. These pensions also include the library employees and the community college staff. Pensions have become a tremendous burden since the economic downturn in 2008. With two major recessions in the past decade, the lack of financial return on the current pension investments and the change in the Federal GASB rules, pensions are an issue that must be resolved.

One option being discussed is returning our income tax rate to the 1994 rate of 5%. In 1995, the income tax rate in Maryland was lowered from 5% to 4.75% on a net income of \$200,000 and under. While I do not serve on the House Appropriations Committee, I am working with a group of legislators to learn more about the budget and look for ways to make cuts and not increase our tax rates. If the income tax rate is returned to the prior rate none of the other taxes under discussion will be needed.

The poll question this week is regarding the funding of teacher pensions. Should the cost be passed on to the County or should the State fund it through a tax increase? Please visit my website: [www.pambeidle.com](http://www.pambeidle.com) to share your opinion with me.

### Researching Bills

If you would like to research any of the bills before the General Assembly visit the website: <http://mlis.state.md.us>. You can listen to the General Assembly sessions and Committee hearings while they are going on live or even listen to past sessions and/or hearings. If you click on "Bill Information and Status" then enter a bill number in the box (HB433) you can review the summary of the bill, hearing dates, committee reports, voting (when available) and fiscal note. If you click on the Bill Number at the top of the page it will take you to the actual bill.

## Civil Marriage

Concerning my vote on HB 438, Civil Marriage, it was truly the most difficult decision and vote that I have made in the past 14 years. After listening closely to my constituents and recording their positions, talking with many professionals and a great deal of prayer and discernment, I made the decision to vote for the Civil Marriage Bill. This year the bill contains strong protections for religious organizations that were not present in last year's bill. No church or religious organization is required to officiate over any marriage. I also voted for amendments that would not allow this bill to become effective until there is time for a referendum and for any litigation resulting from a dispute of referendum to be resolved. I fully expect this issue to go to referendum. The effective date will be no earlier than January 1, 2013, or later if there is a dispute to be resolved.

I do believe that it is a CIVIL right to marry, not a religious right. I also do not believe that my personal religious beliefs should be the reason that I vote for or reject a bill. The day before we were to make our final vote on the bill, a young mother stopped by my office with a letter concerning her daughter's registration to a public charter school. The school was requesting a marriage certificate and a birth certificate showing both parents names. This young mother was in a gay relationship and could not produce a marriage certificate, and her daughter's birth certificate had one parent's name. Children should not be denied or discriminated against because they are the children of gay parents who could not possibly have a marriage certificate. This issue truly alerted me to the types of civil rights issues faced by gay families.

HB 438 has been heard in the Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee and received a Favorable Report. It is expected that the full Senate will vote by the end of this week. If the amended House Bill passes the Senate, the Bill will be signed by the Governor. I expect it will be petitioned to referendum for the November 2012 ballot.

Thank you for allowing me the honor to represent the constituents of District 32. Please continue to stay in touch. My contact information is: Pamela.beidle@house.state.md.us or (410)841-3370. Also, please visit my facebook page, just search Delegate Pam Beidle or my website: [www.pambeidle.com](http://www.pambeidle.com)