



The Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston, MA 02133-1054

Kate Hogan

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Third Middlesex District

Contact:

Scott Kjellberg

Scott.Kjellberg@mahouse.gov

617-722-2637

Mid-Session Report from Mass House of Representatives, Part II

I would like to use this column to discuss House activities, during the last term, with respect to Public Employee Pension Reform, Redistricting, Civil Rights and, of course, Gambling.

The House completed work on another pension reform initiative during this session. The reform legislation, passed by the House on November 16 and signed into law by Governor Patrick shortly thereafter, is expected to save the Commonwealth more than \$5 billion in time. It does this by increasing the career "look back" period from 3 to 5 years--more accurately reflecting an employee's career earnings--to provide a more equitable calculation of retirement benefits and prevent inappropriate salary spiking. It also requires that regular earnings in any year cannot include pay that exceeds average earnings from the previous two years by more than 10 percent. Under the legislation, retirement benefits cannot be received until the individual has reached the minimum retirement age, which the legislation changed for all employee categories.

This last session also saw the Special Joint Committee on Redistricting concentrate its efforts on creating fair and demographically-sound new district maps. The House passed legislation, initially drafted by the Joint Committee, creating 160 new representative districts that included 20 majority-minority districts, 4 majority Hispanic districts, an incumbent-free district in Lawrence and 3 majority Black districts. The House and Senate also passed a new Congressional District map reconfiguring the Commonwealth into nine Congressional Districts, one of which is a new, incumbent-free district made up of Southeastern Massachusetts and Cape Cod. The Joint Committee was able to

accomplish all of this through an open, transparent process that incorporated substantial feedback from elected officials and the general public.

Civil rights and public safety both emerged as priorities in the House during this session. Attorney General Martha Coakley's advocacy provided the framework for enactment of the House and Senate's anti-human trafficking bill. This statute, which may be the toughest legislation of its kind in the nation, ensures that anyone involved in the organization of forced labor and sexual servitude will face tough criminal penalties. The bill also established important protections for both adult and child victims that help them access a range of necessary services.

After nearly six years of working on the transgender equal rights bill, supporters of the bill rejoiced at its passage through the House. The legislation provides fundamental protections for the Commonwealth's approximately 33,000 transgender residents. It extends civil rights and hate crime protection to our state's transgender residents, who often suffer from bias-related violence and employment, housing, and education discrimination. The passage of this bill demonstrates that protecting the safety and well-being of each member of our Commonwealth remains a priority in the legislature.

In keeping with the theme of public safety, the House and Senate again worked together to pass legislation cracking down on habitual criminals. Under the new legislation, habitual offenders would have to serve 2/3rds of their sentence, rather than 1/2, before becoming eligible for parole. Furthermore, habitual offenders sentenced for major crimes enumerated in the bill will not be subsequently eligible for parole, work release or furlough after their conviction nor will their sentences be eligible for reduction or suspension. The "habitual offender" designation will be triggered when an offender, after being convicted of any two major crimes, is convicted of a third major crime. The House and Senate versions of the bill are currently being reconciled by a Joint Conference Committee.

Perhaps the most anticipated piece of legislation coming out of the session thus far has been the gambling bill. As passed by the House and Senate, it will allow three resort style casinos to operate in separate regions of the state, in addition to one competitively-bid slot facility. The three designated casino regions are: the Eastern Region (Suffolk, Middlesex, Essex, Norfolk and Worcester counties); the Southeastern Region (Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties); and the Western Region (Berkshire, Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin counties).

While not a panacea for our weakened economy, the gambling venues are projected to create 15,000 jobs in the Commonwealth. The Gaming Conference Report approved by the Senate and House establishes a 25 percent tax on casino revenues and a 40 percent tax on the slots facility revenues, generating

hundreds-of-millions of dollars a year in state tax revenue that can be used to fund essential state and local services, adding fuel to our economy as we continue to emerge from this recession.

In the next column, I will address my legislative priorities for the remaining months of our two year session that ends on July 31st, 2012.