

JEANNIE HADDAWAY-RICCIO
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and Wicomico Counties

—
ASSISTANT MINORITY WHIP

—
Chair, Talbot County Delegation

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Economic Matters Committee

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Legislative Wrap Up February 12, 2010



Snow Days

The snow made for an interesting session this week in the Maryland General Assembly. Bill hearings were cancelled so that witnesses would not have to travel to Annapolis to testify on proposed legislation however session was held Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio took this picture outside of the House Office Building on Wednesday after leaving the State House.

Legislative Pensions

The State of Maryland's pension system is actuarially unsound to the tune of about \$32 billion. Part of the problem lies in the generousness of the pension plans and the way they are funded. The plan for legislators, for example, is far more generous than most offered in the private sector, especially since it includes a defined benefit. By comparison, fewer than 5% of private sector companies offer defined benefit plans. It is also more generous than the plan offered to other state employees and to teachers.

Delegate Bill Frank (R-District 42) has suggested that the state change over to a defined *contribution* plan instead. Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio supports this change. “First and foremost, it could save the state somewhere between \$700,000 and \$1,000,000 every year,” she said. “Second, in these tough fiscal times, we have to address looming and growing obligations such as pension funding.” A debate on this change will likely take place on Friday or early next week.

Primary Care Shortages in Maryland

Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio has cosponsored legislation to help address the problem of primary care physician shortages in Maryland. It is estimated that there is a 60% shortage in primary care physicians on the Eastern Shore and an even greater number in Western Maryland and Southern Maryland. The lack of primary care has become a national problem as less than 2% of new physicians are choosing primary care as a field. Nurse Practitioners can help fill the gap, but legal and regulatory constraints have made it difficult for them practice. House Bill 319 would remove some of those barriers without expanding their scope of practice. A hearing was scheduled to be held on the bill in the House Health and Government Operations Committee this Thursday. However, it will be rescheduled due to the inclement weather.

Job Creation Tax Credit

The Governor has introduced legislation that creates an income tax credit for employers who hire qualified individuals between January 1, 2010, and December 31, 2010. The tax credit would be \$3,000 per employee hired and is capped at \$250,000. \$20 million has been set aside in the State Budget for the credit. In a hearing on the bill, many representatives from the business community testified in favor of the concept, but reminded legislators that there is still an overarching problem with Maryland’s business climate. The business climate combined with tough economic times has resulted in many businesses still not having enough work (or enough capital) to hire new employees.