

General Assembly Update January 30, 2015

January Highlights:

Numerous Election Bills dominated the League's agenda in the first two full weeks of this General Assembly session. The bills are referred to 3 House subcommittees, 2 Senate Subcommittees, and both full Privileges and Election Committees. Significant bills that the League supports have passed in Senate subcommittees such as those for redistricting, the vote center pilot, no excuse voting for 65 and over, and additional acceptable voter Photo IDs.

Registration by Party went to the Senate floor where it was defeated. The companion House bill did not pass in the P&E subcommittee. The Fiscal impact statement showed a huge cost to localities for printing and mailings -- \$600,000 total for all jurisdictions -- as well as costs for the Department of Elections.

All 30 House Constitutional amendment proposals were assigned to the House P&E subcommittee to be heard but no votes were allowed until the last meeting per the rule stated by the Chairman of the full P&E Committee. The rule also stated that the committee can only pass five of the bills. There are also 13 Senate Constitutional amendment bills that will be scheduled to be heard in the House P&E Constitutional Amendment subcommittee if they pass in the Senate.

Three legislators (Delegate Filler-Corn, Senator Favola and Senator McDougle) sponsored the League's "Head of the Line" bills that would allow voters 75 and over or with physical disabilities to request to go to the head of the line rather than vote curbside during the hours of 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM. The bill did not pass in the House P&E Subcommittee after strong statements in opposition from VEBA and the General Registrars Association. Similarly, the bill did not get the required votes in the Senate P&E Subcommittee where Senators asked for examples of incidents and the prevalence of cases where elderly or physically disabled voters were not served well at the polling place.

The bill to require counting prisoners at their home address to comply with the principle of "one man, one vote" and ensure equal representation in local jurisdiction districts (HB1465) was not assigned to a subcommittee. It may be mistakenly considered as one of redistricting reform bills but it certainly is not. The House P&E subcommittee that will hear the redistricting bills was instructed to hear those bills at their very last meeting. The companion Senate bill SB465 (Edwards) did not pass in Senate P&E subcommittee or after being heard in the full P&E committee.

HB1463 (Rasoul) Failed. It would have changed the definition of "Party" by lowering the required percentage of votes cast (from 10% to 4%) in an election to qualify as a "Party". If the bar is too high, an organized group could not be one that voters can declare on their registration if the registration by party proposal would have passed.

Libertarians Bill Redpath and Robert Sarvis spoke in support of lowering the required number of petition signatures to secure a place on the ballot for statewide races, but the bill did not pass.