



## WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

April 24, 2009

MTA Phone: 517-321-6467

MTA FAX: 517-321-8908

Please route to all interested parties in your township.

### **HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORTS NO-REASON AV BILLS**

On Wednesday, the House Ethics and Elections Committee reported two bills to the House floor addressing no-reason absentee voting (AV). Both bills are designed to eliminate the six current legal reasons for requesting an AV ballot and instead allow a voter to request an AV ballot for any reason (or no reason). [HB 4097](#), introduced by Rep. Marty Griffin (D-Jackson), and [HB 4367](#), introduced by Rep. Woodrow Stanley (D-Flint), are identical bills to allow voters the option of voting an AV ballot without providing an excuse. Amendments were added to both bills to allow voters to request AV ballots by fax or e-mail in addition to traditional mail or in person. The committee vote was along party lines with Democrats supporting the bills and Republicans opposed. MTA supports no-reason AV as a reasonable way to make voting more convenient for the voter and because it would eliminate the need for people being forced to conform to one of the six current reasons to obtain an AV ballot. While it is expected the bills will eventually pass the House, Republican opposition in the Senate over concerns about perceived increased voter fraud remains a serious barrier to final implementation.

### **RECREATIONAL AUTHORITIES LEGISLATION MOVES**

Legislation moved one step closer this week to passage that would create stronger recreational authorities across the state. [SB 222](#), offered by Sen. John Gleason (D-Flushing), and [HB 4700](#), offered by Rep. Kate Segal (D-Battle Creek), were reported from the House Education Committee this week. A full House vote is expected next week on the measures. Under current law, cities, villages, townships and counties may work together to form a recreational authority. Noticeably missing from the list of governmental units that may make use of the law are school districts. The two bills will allow school districts to work with other local governments to partner in the formation of a recreational authority. It was noted that it is school districts that have already invested in the gyms, pools and athletic fields that are so critical to recreation programs. This legislation will allow communities to take greater advantage of existing infrastructure and also provide a tool in acquiring any needed additional facilities.

### **STATE PARK PROPOSAL DRAWING STRONG OPPOSITION**

A proposal to link vehicle registrations with a \$10 annual state parks permit is drawing opposition from the County Road Association of MI (CRAM) and other organizations. Identical legislation to implement the new park revenue plan has been introduced in the House and Senate; SBs [388](#) and [389](#) and HBs [4677](#) and [4688](#), sponsored respectively by Sens. Birkholz (R-Saugatuck Twp.) and Basham (D-Taylor), and Reps. Warren (D-Ann Arbor) and Meekhof (Olive Twp.). The legislation would add a \$10 state parks permit fee to all vehicle registrations in Michigan unless the driver specifically asks to opt out of the park "passport fee." The annual fee would allow passengers in vehicles with the passport to enter all state parks with no additional charge. The concept behind the legislation is to create a stable revenue source for state parks and drivers an easier way to renew their annual parks permits. If the legislation gains approval, opposition from CRAM will come in the form of a legal challenge. The local road association is claiming that the new park fee is unconstitutional as all "taxes" imposed on vehicle registrations must be dedicated to roads. Proponents of the legislation, including most environmental and conservation groups and the Michigan Manufacturers Association, are claiming the new vehicle charge is a fee not a tax and allows for an opt-out. An attorney general opinion is being sought on the subject but is rarely provided on proposed law changes. Other organizations lining up in opposition include MML and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. Some county and township officials have expressed concerns over the proposal causing motorists to think that the new state park passport will allow them access to all parks and not distinguishing between which parks are local versus state owned and operated.

\*\*\*END\*\*\*