

## Legislative session nearing end

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The last regularly scheduled week of the 2007 session of the General Assembly was very busy, as many bills bounced back and forth between the House and Senate as proponents sought concurrence, while some bills ended up in a conference committee. A major issue between the House and Senate was reaching an agreement on a *Sine Die* resolution. This resolution determines when the General Assembly returns to Columbia and what business it will take up. The General Assembly agreed to return to Columbia this week and the following week to complete work on bills that are in conference committees – chief among them the budget and DOT reform, and to take up the Governor's vetoes.

The following were among the flurry of bills that received action this past week:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE/COURTS - The General Assembly passed, and the Governor has since signed into law, S.141, the "CRIMINAL GANG PREVENTION ACT." This comprehensive legislation addresses the problem of gangs. Among other things, the bill adds criminal gang activities to the jurisdiction of the State Grand Jury. The stated intent of this bill is to eradicate the fear and harm created by criminal gangs by providing enhanced penalties and by eliminating the patterns, profits, proceeds, instrumentalities, and property facilitating criminal gang activity, including criminal gang recruitment.

The House amended and returned to the Senate S.274 establishing DAY REPORTING CENTERS. This bill allows the Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon Services (PPP) to establish day reporting centers for certain inmates or offenders. 'Day reporting center' means a state facility providing supervision of inmates or offenders placed on supervision that includes, but is not limited to, mandatory reporting, program participation, drug testing, community service, and any other conditions as determined by PPP. The intention of these day reporting centers, set up as a year-long pilot program, is to return nonviolent offenders to society better rehabilitated and with improved job skills. This bill did not make it to conference committee, but will be further considered when the General Assembly convenes in January.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - The House of Representatives concurred in the Senate amendments to H.3569, a joint resolution creating the South Carolina Broadband Technology and Communications Commission for the purpose of implementing a statewide wireless broadband network. The goal of the Commission is to ensure that all South Carolinians have affordable access to broadband products and services as quickly as possible; and that the policies of this State promote technological neutrality, competition, investment, and innovation so that broadband service providers have sufficient incentive to develop and offer these products and services. The Commission is to be made up of seventeen members, of whom fourteen are voting members and three are nonvoting members.

HEALTHCARE - The House and Senate passed H. 4178, a joint resolution to establish a Medicaid Transportation Advisory Committee. The Committee is comprised of Medicaid service providers, local transportation providers, and Medicaid recipients, who require transportation services. The Committee is charged with reviewing issues and complaints concerning the Medicaid Transportation Brokerage System and making recommendations for the resolution of these issues and complaints.

ENVIRONMENT - The House and Senate passed H.3034, a bill to provide for the "Energy Independence and Sustainable Construction Act of 2007." The legislation requires new state-funded major facility projects to comply with specified "green building" energy efficiency and conservation standards. The legislation provides for the size and scope of construction or renovation that qualifies a project as a major facility project subject to the required standards. The State Budget and Control Board is required to develop and implement a process to monitor and evaluate the energy and environmental benefits associated with each major facility project designed, constructed, or renovated in compliance with this legislation and submit an annual report to the General Assembly.

Bills that did not pass this session remain alive for consideration when the General Assembly returns in January of 2008, and will be joined by any new bills that are filed. In last month's column, I mistakenly wrote that almost 5000 bills had been filed this session. In fact, the number is approximately 2000. However, by the end of the 2008 session, the number will, indeed, be several thousand in number.