



## MVMA Legislative Report

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March was a busy month on Beacon Hill and around the state. While everyone celebrated the first day of spring a few weeks ago, legislative committees had a more important date circled on their calendars: Joint Rule 10 Day. This day marks the biennial reporting deadline for all legislative committees to make recommendations on timely filed bills that have been under review for more than a year. Some bills made it through the committee process and will continue to move forward, but hundreds more were sent to “study,” a status that generally designates that no further action will be taken during this session. Committees can also issue extension orders on bills that require more time and thought. Among the bills that received extensions were a few high-profile issues such as Gov. Deval Patrick’s proposed reorganization of local housing authorities, the charter school expansion bills, and the Speaker’s gun violence initiative.

Although the State House was bustling to get bills moved in time for the Joint Rule 10 deadline, a few key issues in the state have made actual progress. Although both chambers want to raise the state’s minimum wage, House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Therese Murray have yet to reach agreement on how to achieve this. The Senate passed a minimum wage increase bill in November and an unemployment insurance bill in February, but Speaker DeLeo has been more cautious in his plans for how the House will move forward. His latest proposal calls for a three-year, phased-in increase of the minimum wage to \$10.50 an hour – just 50 cents shy of what the Senate voted – and ties it to reforms in the state’s unemployment insurance program. During the first week of April, the House voted strongly in favor of DeLeo’s plan, but reconciling it with the Senate’s actions may prove difficult.

During the next two months, the legislature’s focus will shift to the state’s FY2015 budget. After reviewing the Governor’s budget recommendations, the House Ways and Means Committee will release its own proposal this week, after which the full House will debate and amend it and send the result to the Senate. Over the next few weeks, the Senate Ways and Means Committee will make further changes before sending the budget to the full Senate for debate during the week of May 18<sup>th</sup>. Differences between versions adopted by the House and Senate will be resolved by a six-member conference committee, which is expected to return a final compromise to both chambers for final approval in June.

March was an eventful month for political campaigns in the Commonwealth. Most notably, Republican Gubernatorial candidate Mark Fisher recently filed a court challenge to the ruling by state party officials that he had failed to qualify for a spot on September’s primary ballot. If he does make it on to the ballot, he will compete with Republican frontrunner Charlie Baker in the primary. The five Democratic candidates for Governor, which include Treasurer Steven Grossman and Attorney General Martha Coakley, have also been actively campaigning around the state this month.

Democrats meanwhile swept five special elections on Apr. 1, even picking up the former House district of recently elected senator Donald Humason of Westfield, a district held by Republicans for 36 years. In the last of this year's special elections, another Democrat, Evandro Carvalho, dispatched all his opponents in his party's primary; with no one else on the Apr. 29 ballot, he too will join the legislature soon, replacing jailed former representative Carlos Henriquez. The legislature is saying farewell, however, to a few prominent members. Rep. Carl Sciortino in late March announced plans to step down in order to take the help of the AIDS Action Committee, while Springfield's Rep. Cheryl Coakley-Rivera resigned upon accepting a position as assistant clerk in the Hampden County Superior Court.

**MVMA Issues this month:**

Senator Karen Spilka's bill to ensure the safety of people with pets in disasters was signed by the Governor. The bill calls for emergency operators to include in their plans strategies to support the needs of people who have pets, including service animals.

All bills before the joint Judiciary Committee, which is operating without a House Chair after Rep. Eugene O'Flaherty left the legislature to become chief counsel to Boston's new mayor, received extensions until the end of July. Among them were several relating to animal welfare, including Sen. Bruce Tarr's bill to "Protect Animal Welfare and Safety (PAWS)" and Rep. Jason Lewis's bill to prevent farm animal cruelty.

Representative Kafka's bill, an act to ensure adequate care of animals in cities and towns, received a favorable report from the Municipalities Committee and is moving forward. The bill would compel dog officers to maintain a list of additional resources for residents who cannot care for an animal.