

March 2011

Boston's 2011-2012 Legislative Package 2

A second look at bills and petitions submitted by the City of Boston

As a second installment of new and re-filed bills in the Mayor's legislative package for the 2011-2012 session of the General Court, this month's article focuses on a few additional new bills/petitions of interest. As noted last month, the City's top priority is to achieve reform of municipal healthcare. Through a home rule petition for Boston and a proposed bill for all municipalities, the City is requesting authorization to create local Group Insurance Commissions to give Boston and other municipalities administrative control over plan design, including plan selection, co-pays and deductibles. This plan would provide cities and towns with comparable tools utilized by the state since 1955. In addition, the City is seeking plan design provisions in negotiations underway with its unions for new employee contracts. Other bills or petitions of interest include:

Public Safety - To achieve greater efficiencies and increase Boston police officer deployment, the City has submitted legislation to create a Suffolk County lockup facility to be operated by the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department would be responsible for all post-booking transportation to and from a regional lockup facility, meals and the guarding of hospitalized prisoners. The City estimates that this plan would generate savings for the Police Department of approximately \$1.2M annually and allow about 110 Boston police officers over three shifts to be deployed to other assignments.

A bill to employ technology to enhance public safety would create an electronic database for sales of firearms and ammunition, require that any semiautomatic firearm manufactured or delivered

in the state be capable of micro-stamping ammunition, and expand the list of crimes for which the police can take a DNA sample and allow the sample to be taken at the time of arrest.

Public Education - The City has filed a bill to authorize the establishment of single-sex schools, classes and educational programs as a tool to help close the achievement gap. Experience in other states show that single-sex classes can break down gender stereotypes with girls more likely to take classes in math, science and technology and boys to take classes in music, drama and foreign languages.

Environment - Updating the bottle bill is the intent of a bill that had been previously filed. The bill would expand the bottle bill to include water, sports drinks, flavored teas and juice containers.

Of interest to homeowners of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay is a bill that would provide groundwater protection tax credits for installation of an innovative groundwater recharge system or for the inspection or repair of wood pilings used to support the foundation of the property.

Housing -. A home rule petition now in the Legislature would require banks and mortgage companies to participate in a mediation session before they are allowed to foreclose on a homeowner. Before a residential mortgage could be foreclosed, the City would have to certify the creditor's or mortgagee's good faith participation in foreclosure mediation.