BILL WATCH FOR MARCH 25, 2019:

Gun Safe Storage Bill on Tuesday's House Agenda

House Bill 63 - **Safe Storage of Guns**
Sponsored: State Rep. Sean Lynn, D-Dover
Released from committee 3/13.
On the House Agenda for Tuesday, 3/26.
This bill would mandate that the owners of firearms secure their weapons or risk being charged with an offense should one of their guns be obtained by a minor or "unauthorized person" and later used to commit a crime or cause serious injury. While the bill includes a defense for gun owners who lose their weapons as the result of a home burglary, it contains no provision for losses due to theft. Under the legislation, a gun owner could be charged with a class A or class B misdemeanor for a violation, depending on the circumstances.
STATUS: Available for House consideration.

Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 25 -
Raising the Smoking/Vaping Age
Sponsored: State Sen. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark-Bear
Passed the Senate 14 to 6 on Tuesday (3/19).
The bill seeks to raise the legal age for purchasing tobacco and vaping products in Delaware from 18 to 21-years-old.
STATUS: Pending action in the House Health & Human Development Committee.

House Bill 73 - **Changing Absentee Voting**
Sponsored: State Rep. Earl Jaques, D-Glasgow
Released from the House Administration Committee.
This bill is the first leg of a constitutional amendment to eliminate from the Delaware Constitution present limitations on voting by absentee ballot. Amending the constitution requires a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the legislature in two consecutive General Assemblies. Should the amendment be enacted, it would give the legislature the ability to make future changes to absentee voting requirements by way of ordinary bills that could be passed with simple majorities in a single session -- a much lower threshold than is presently required.

An identical bill was proposed in the last General Assembly, but died awaiting action in the House of Representatives. Currently, any registered voter can vote by absentee ballot in Delaware if they cannot come to the polls because they are in public service; are in the military; are the spouse of military serviceman or woman; have a child who requires constant care; is a student; is otherwise eligible, but incarcerated; is sick or physically disabled; is on vacation; or religious restrictions prevent the voter from coming to the polls.
STATUS: On the House Ready List, eligible to be placed on the House Agenda.

House Bill 38 - Establishing Early Voting
Sponsored: State Rep. David Bentz, D-Newark-Christiana
Passed by the House on Tuesday (3/19) by a vote of 34 to 6.
This measure seeks to allow in-person early voting in Delaware beginning January 1, 2022. Early voting would be open for at least 10 days prior to the election in at least one location in each county. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 37 states allow any qualified voter to cast a ballot at a designated location prior to Election Day. State Rep. Ron Gray, R-Selbyville, was among the six dissenting votes in the House. "Our state already has in place a system for voting before the election through absentee ballots," he said. "I was not convinced early voting was necessary and, therefore, was not comfortable changing a system that has worked for our state for so long." An identical bill passed the House last year, 25 to 15, but died in the Senate.
STATUS: Pending action in the Senate Elections, Government & Community Affairs Committee.

House Bill 56 - Naming U.S. 301 in Delaware
Sponsored: State Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Odessa-Townsend-Port Penn
Released from the House Transportation, Land Use and Infrastructure Committee (3/20).
This measure seeks to name the Delaware portion of U.S. Route 301, between Route 1 and the Delaware-Maryland state line, as the "First Responders Memorial Highway."
STATUS: On the House Ready List, eligible to be placed on the House Agenda.