

Republican Lawmakers Propose, Support “Good Government” Package

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For More Information, Contact: Joe Fulgham, 302-744-4184

Republican lawmakers today called for unified support of a package of legislation aimed at improving the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of state government.

Five of the bills are new proposals, while three were introduced in the last legislative session and are being filed for new consideration.

“We are throwing our support behind these bills, but none of them should be considered partisan,” said State House Minority Danny Short, R-Seafood. “We’re supporting them because they are sensible; will increase transparency and accountability; and hold the promise of improving state government.”

Underscoring his remarks, Rep. Short noted that of the three measures in the package that were previously introduced, two had garnered bipartisan support.

House Bill 26 – This bill is the first leg of a constitutional amendment that would require the General Assembly to wait 48 hours from the introduction of the “money bills” (the state operating budget, capital budget, and Grants-in-Aid bill) before voting on such legislation. “The intent is to give citizens, legislators, and members of the media a reasonable amount of time to review the state’s spending plans before they’re enacted,” said the bill’s prime sponsor and Joint Finance Committee member, State Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown. The mandatory waiting period could be waived by a three-quarters supermajority vote. The bill was previously introduced as House Bill 341 in the 149th General Assembly.

Status: The bill has been pending action in the House Administration Committee since January 4th.

House Bill 59 – Sponsored by State Rep. Andria Bennett, D-Dover East, this bipartisan bill would require the Secretary of Transportation to publish the transaction history for a state lawmaker’s Community Transportation Fund (CTF) allotment. Each state legislator receives CTF money annually to finance small road, sidewalk, and drainage projects in their district typically too small for the state’s master transportation plan. State Rep. Bryan Shupe, R-Milford South, is a co-sponsor of the bill and a former mayor of Milford. “CTF money serves a good purpose, addressing local needs,” he said. “Milford has benefited from this money on several occasions while I was mayor. Still, we should be as transparent as possible, allowing people to see exactly how we’re spending tax money in the community.”

Status: The bill has been pending action in the House Transportation/Land Use and Infrastructure Committee since February 28th.

Candidate tax debt disclosure: Originally filed as [House Bill 315](#) in the 149th General Assembly, this bill drew bipartisan support. It seeks to require that all candidates that may appear on the general election ballot disclose if they are in arrears on their state or federal personal income tax obligations or if they have any unpaid property taxes due. “If you are seeking the authority to spend taxpayer money, voters should know whether or not you are paying your taxes,” said State Rep. Steve Smyk, one of the bill’s prime sponsors.

Double-dipping prevention disclosure: Originally filed as [House Bill 73](#) in the 149th General Assembly, this bipartisan measure would require elected officials who are employed by another taxpayer-funded organization to share that information with the Public Integrity Commission (PIC). The disclosure would assist the commission and the State Auditor to evaluate if the official was receiving dual compensation for overlapping hours of work.

A constitutional amendment ending the last legislative day of the session at 7 p.m.: The last day of the Delaware General Assembly’s legislative session ends on June 30th. By practice and tradition, the legislature closes the regular session at midnight and enters into “special session” a minute later at 12:01 a.m. July 1st. The maneuver allows the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tem of the Senate to call their respective chambers back into session after lawmakers finish their business. Otherwise, that power would rest solely with the governor.

“Our last day is structured and delayed so that we have bills remaining to be worked after midnight,” said State House Minority Leader Danny Short. “Sometimes we find ourselves dealing with controversial measures deep in the wee hours when most of the public is asleep. That was the case last year when a minimum wage bill was run through the House at 3:40 a.m. This simple change would largely fix this.”

“Outside of the public transparency issue, I think we’ll save lives,” said State House Minority Whip Tim Dukes, R-Laurel. “More than one person has told me they dozed off behind the wheel while driving home from here at 4 a.m. It’s a flawed practice that needs to be fixed.”

Bill to create an incentive program to reward employees who suggest viable ideas to improve the delivery of government services or the efficiency of operations. This bill seeks to set aside a small appropriation for state agencies interested in establishing limited duration pilot programs to solicit cost-cutting, efficiency, and service improvement suggestions from employees. The bill will establish a framework for agencies to invite, evaluate, and implement workable ideas. The objective would be to have the programs produce improvements of a value exceeding the investment. The pilot programs would be evaluated for effectiveness to determine if they should be extended or expanded. “This is a modest experiment aimed at helping to facilitate a culture of improvement,” said State Rep. Kevin Hensley, R-Townsend-Odessa-Port Penn.

Constitutional amendment establishing Delaware Crossover Day. At least 26 states – including Georgia, Virginia, and West Virginia – have laws mandating that all bills coming before a chamber from the other chamber must be passed by the originating chamber a set number of legislative days before the end of session. This bill would set Delaware’s Crossover Day on or before June 20th. Because the final state revenue forecast on which the money bills (i.e., operating budget, capital budget, and Grants-in-Aid) are based is not released until the third Monday in June, those measures would be exempted from this requirement. The House or Senate could waive the condition with a resolution approved by a two-thirds majority. “Establishing a Crossover Day would set the legislative table in the closing days of the session, allowing for a more deliberative and open process,” said State Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden-Wyoming. “It would reduce the possibility of intentionally rushing complicated or controversial legislation through both chambers in the closing hours of the session.”

House Resolution amending House Rules requiring a three-fifths majority for suspension of rules. This bill seeks to place a higher threshold on suspending the procedures under which the House of Representatives works bills including requirements for committee hearings and public notification. “Our House Rules can currently be bypassed entirely if just 21 of our 41 members choose to do so,” said State Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, the resolution’s prime sponsor. “These procedures are safeguards to ensure bills are carefully considered and provide the press with an opportunity to report and the public with a chance to participate. Rules protecting the integrity of the process should not be so easy to disregard. We should be required to meet a higher threshold.”

The new measures will be circulated for sponsorship starting today and will remain open until the General Assembly returns in two weeks from its Easter Break. “We want to give all lawmakers an ample chance to consider and support these proposals,” Rep. Short said.

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