

## **Under the Dome with DeAngelo**

*An Update on the New Jersey State Government by Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo  
(May 2015)*

As the weather is heating up, so too is the activity Under the Dome where lawmakers are extraordinarily active as usual with a hectic May and June legislative schedule.

The main focus of the next two months will be finalizing the Fiscal Year 2016 state budget. As set forth by Governor Christie in February, the proposed \$33.8 billion budget would demonstrate an increase in spending of 3.1 percent. Making balancing the state budget incredibly complicated is a lawsuit pending before the New Jersey Supreme Court over requiring the State to pay previously determined installments into the pension system for public employees.

A lower court ruled that Governor Christie broke the law when he dramatically slashed \$1.57 billion from the current Fiscal Year 2015 pension payment. In doing so, the Governor left less than \$700 million going into the pension system; a system that currently has a \$40 billion unfunded liability. Recently, the State Treasurer announced that the revenues for the current year have increased by \$200 million which the Administration may add to the planned pension payment. The Supreme Court, however, is not expected to rule on the case until June which will be pivotal as to the final amount that will be put forth to the pension system. That payment amount will greatly impact the entirety of the state budget. Regardless of the court decision, a state budget, under the constitution, must be in place by July 1.

A secondary lawsuit brought by approximately a dozen labor unions to similarly rule the Governor's failure to plan to pay the required share into the forthcoming Fiscal Year 2016 is pending before Superior Court. However, the presiding justice, Judge Jacobson who also handed down the lower ruling on the Fiscal Year 2015 case, has postponed hearings until the Supreme Court has issued its ruling on that original case. Rulings in late June on one or both of these cases could create chaos in the on-going budget process. One thing is for sure, the rulings in these two cases will leave a dramatic and permanent imprint in the way in which the State of New Jersey shall be responsible for pension payments for years to come.

Meanwhile, since the Legislature returned from spring recess, the Governor has signed into law several new measures, including:

- Stopping state contracts to companies or vendors that are delinquent on their payments into the unemployment insurance (UI) fund -- a measure that I was proud to be the leading sponsor of in the Assembly
- Prohibiting the manufacturing, sale or promotion of personal care products that contain microbeads.
- Requiring annual medical examinations for children under the age of 19 to include questions regarding cardiovascular disease health.

- Authorizing the Attorney General to create a statewide coordinated efforts to combat opioid drug abuse.
- Requiring school district superintendents to annually provide a list to local Boards of Education of district contracts that will expire in the coming year. I wrote this law to prevent no-bid contracts from being awarded in school districts without appropriate oversight.
- Criminalizing reverse rate evasion as a form of insurance fraud in order to stop New Jersey residents from holding out-of-state insurance by lying about their residency. After working on this law for several years as the prime sponsor, I am proud to see go into effect.

Many of these new law were inspired by ideas brought by citizens to their legislators or by local incidents. So, if you have an idea about what laws should exist or should change, feel free to contact me and I will seek to examine the issues and the feasibility of the proposal.

A reminder to those senior citizens or disabled individuals who have qualified in the past - or may qualify for the first time this year -- to submit their application for the Property Tax Reimbursement Program, commonly referred to as "Senior Freeze." The application deadline is currently June 1, 2015. To qualify, you must be 65 years or older or receiving Social Security benefits; a resident of New Jersey for at least 10 years; living at the current residence for three years; and with a household income for 2014 of \$85,553 or less. For more information, please contact my office at (609) 631-7501.

Enjoying the upcoming Memorial Day weekend and the unofficial start to the summer, and I look forward to seeing you back here Under the Dome.

***Editor's Note:** Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-Hamilton) represents the 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative District which includes parts of Mercer and Middlesex counties. He can be reached at [AsmDeAngelo@njleg.org](mailto:AsmDeAngelo@njleg.org); phone (609) 631-7501; [www.WayneDeAngelo.org](http://www.WayneDeAngelo.org); Facebook: Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo; or Twitter: @DeAngeloLD14.*