

Under the Dome with DeAngelo

*An Update on the New Jersey State Government by Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo
(January 2016)*

Happy New Year to you and your families! I hope that 2016 has started off well in your households and businesses.

Under the State House Dome as the calendar turned to 2016, the final days of the State Legislature brought hundreds of bills before lawmakers to consider. By the time that the 216th Legislature completed their work, 158 pieces of legislation were placed before Governor Christie for his final consideration. The Governor signed 93 bills and pocket vetoed the remainder.

Among those bills signed into law were 11 bills that were specifically aimed at assisting veterans and their families by providing programs and benefits for them or simply by altering regulations to give them a hand. For example, children whose parents or guardians are ordered into active military service will now be able to remain enrolled in the school district where that parent or guardian resided prior to active duty. This change will allow children whose daily lives will be impacted by military service to have a level of stability and support through their school lives.

To provide financial relief to veterans, they will now be able to defer property tax payments due during their deployment while another law creates a financial planning assistance program for disabled veterans and their caregivers. On a more local level, disabled veterans and Purple Heart recipients will be exempt from paying municipal parking meter fees while 100 percent disabled veterans will be exempt from construction permit fees for improvements to make their residences more accessible.

I am proud to have been a sponsor on a majority of these bills as I continue to believe that we must support our veterans and their families. Many of these bills have come about from constituents who have come to me seeking assistance with situations they are facing relative to a family members, or their, military services. For instance, one bill that is now law will allow active duty military members who are deployed -- and their immediate family members who are stationed with them -- to have additional time to renew their driver's licenses or vehicle registration should the documents expire during their deployment.

This law came as a result of a local family where a wife relocated to Germany while her husband was deployed there. During the timeframe that they were abroad, her license was going to expire. Because she had already used her existing driver's license photo during a previous renewal, the state Motor Vehicle Commission would not permit another use. Early renewal prior to deployment would not be possible either because of a rule governing how far in advance a license can be renewed. This put her in a dilemma of potentially having an expired license. The law now will prevent such circumstances by allowing individuals to renew their license six months before deployment or 90 days after returning home. When you and your family are preparing to deploy on a military mission, one of the last things that anyone should have to worry about is the expiration date on motor vehicle documents. It's common sense laws like this that will help avoid needless worries for veterans and their military families.

Beyond these military and veterans-centered laws, other measures that also are now law include:

- Requiring the Board of Public Utilities to establish procedures allowing electric power and gas customers to switch energy providers.
- Permitting individuals to register to vote at age 17 in order to participate in elections occurring at the next election after they turn 18 years old.
- Establishing a more clear procedure for the consolidation of fire districts.
- Allows the use of a stored driver's license photo for individuals undergoing chemotherapy or other medical treatments.
- Authorizing youth camps to maintain a supply of epinephrine and permitting trained employees to administer it to camp members from anaphylaxis
- Prohibiting the sale or distribution of liquid nicotine that is not in child-resistant containers
- Providing for the licensure of chiropractic assistants.
- Creating requirements for training programs for homemaker-home health aides caring for patients with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders.

Unfortunately, the Governor pocket vetoed several pieces of legislation. The end of a legislative session is the only time that any New Jersey Governor has pocket-veto authority. Sponsors of these bills can now decide whether or not to re-introduce these bills and move them through the legislative process again. Some of the bills that were vetoed include:

- Requiring drivers to turn on the vehicle's interior light when they are pulled over by a law enforcement officer.
- Mandating 20-minute recess for elementary school students.
- Raising the age for the purchase and sale of tobacco products and electronic smoking devices from 19 to 21.
- Prohibiting firearm possession by those convicted of carjacking, gang criminality, racketeering and terroristic threats.
- Creating a grants-in-aid appropriation for Lead Hazard Control Assistance Fund for lead-based paint removal.
- Prohibiting the possession, transport, import, export, processing, sale or shipment of parts and products of certain animal species threatened with extinction.
- Requiring county and municipal police departments to establish cultural diversity training courses and plans.

On Tuesday, January 12, 2016, the 217th State Legislature was sworn into office for a two-year legislative session. There is no change in the partisan balance of the State Senate since their body as a whole was not up for election. It remains at 24 Democrats and 16 Republicans with Senate President Steve Sweeney remaining at the helm.

The General Assembly make-up, however, has changed as a result of the November elections with 52 Democrats and 48 Republicans. Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto was selected to serve in the leadership capacity again. The increase of the democratic majority is the largest since 1979. In situations where the Legislature attempts an override a veto from Governor, the democratic majority would still be shy of the 54 votes necessary to do so.

With many new faces joining the General Assembly in the new Legislature, I am excited to get to work with them and my returning colleagues as we continue to move our state forward Under the Dome.

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