

February 27, 2009

Free Septic System Upgrades

The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund is considered to be one of the most significant environmental policies of our time. Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio was a cosponsor of the legislation that created the Restoration Fund, which is being used to clean up the State's most polluting waste water treatment plants, but also to fix old, failing septic systems. Failing septic systems leak nitrogen into the ground that eventually ends up in the Chesapeake Bay and our drinking water.

As part of the Restoration Fund initiative, citizens can apply to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to have the septic system upgrade done for free. To date, very few people have taken advantage of this program. Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio would like to change that and is encouraging her constituents to take advantage of it as soon as possible. "There are two important reasons to do it now," Haddaway said. "First, it is an important step toward removing nutrient pollution from the Chesapeake Bay. Second, it is very possible that in the near future, the State of Maryland will be requiring citizens to make these upgrades and I am concerned that many of my constituents will not be able to afford the cost on their own."

If you wonder whether this is a possibility or not, one need only look at House Bill 1083, House Bill 346 or House Bill 176, all of which are currently pending in the Environmental Matters Committee. Each bill requires citizens to install new technology on their septic systems that can cost anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per system. One bill would even make it a misdemeanor with a \$1,000 fine if citizens do not comply. "The intent of the legislation is good," Haddaway added. "We all want a cleaner Chesapeake Bay, but at the same time, we have to be sensitive to the tough economic times we are in. We should allow the program we already have in place to start working before we put this additional burden on our citizens." For more information on how to get your septic system upgraded, contact Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio or visit the Maryland Department of the Environment's web site at:

<http://www.mde.state.md.us/Water/CBWRF/osds/>

Unemployment Insurance for Part Time Workers

This week, Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio and other members of the House Economic Matters Committee held a hearing on an emergency bill that would provide unemployment benefits to part time workers. Under the legislation, part time workers would be defined as those who work at least 15 hours per week. Many small businesses came in to testify against the legislation citing a tough economy and an already increased unemployment insurance rate. In September, the Secretary of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) increased rates on businesses because more money was being paid out of the fund than was coming in.

Given the fact that more and more people will be collecting unemployment in the near future, businesses anticipate another increase in their insurance rate. With that in

mind, legislators and business owners questioned why the bill was drafted as emergency legislation, which under Maryland's constitution is traditionally reserved for threats to public safety and health. They also questioned the fact that the bill defines part time work as 15 hours per week rather than 20 hours per week.

The committee is expected to vote on the measure in the next few weeks.

Alternative Energy Incentive Act of 2009

Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio announced that she is cosponsoring legislation that would exempt the sale of residential wind energy equipment from sales tax and property tax. The bill would also clarify a current state law pertaining to a property tax exemption for residential use of solar energy. The intent of the legislation is to provide additional incentives for residential alternative energy use. "Right now one of the biggest roadblocks to consumers is the price of the equipment," Haddaway said. "Any incentives we can offer to Maryland citizens in the form of grants or tax incentives will help us achieve our renewable energy goals in the State." Haddaway is a member of the Public Utilities Subcommittee and as such, has been an active player in renewable energy policy in Maryland. In the past, she has cosponsored legislation such as a bill establishing a Renewable Portfolio Standard, a bill authorizing net metering and a Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative bill that created the Maryland Strategic Energy Investment Program.

Coming Up Next Week in the Economic Matters Committee

- Employee Misclassification
- Mandatory Shift Breaks for Businesses
- Consumer Protection/Identity Theft
- Nanobiotechnology Research

For more information on this and other issues, please feel free to contact Delegate Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio's office by calling (410) 841-3429 or by emailing jeannie.haddaway@house.state.md.us.