

STATE HOUSE NEWS - DECEMBER 2008

A monthly recap for GluckWalrath's government and public relations partners.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

The Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee favorably reported on Monday, a bill that would make New Jersey the fourteenth state in the nation to permit the use of marijuana for medical purposes. SENATE, NO. 119 (*Scutari D-22/Whelan D-2*) would establish the "New Jersey Compassionate Use Medical Marijuana Act" to provide legal protection for the vast majority of chronically ill people who use marijuana to alleviate pain or other symptoms associated with certain debilitating medical conditions such as cancer, glaucoma, or HIV and AIDS. Patients would need a written recommendation from their doctor, and approval from the State Department of Health and Senior Services. The bill faces an uphill battle in the General Assembly as family rights groups and law enforcement officials argue that the measure sends a conflicting message to youth about illegal drug use and its long-term ramifications.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION WOES

The Senate failed to pass a measure earlier this week that would provide significant reductions in the contributions local governments must make to the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) and Police and Firemen's Retirement System (PFRS) in State fiscal years 2009 through 2011. In summary, SENATE, NO. 7 (*Codey D-27*) would reduce for local employers the normal and accrued liability contributions to a percentage of the amount certified annually by PERS and PFRS. This percentage would equal not more than 50% for payments due in fiscal year 2009; not more than 60% for payments due in fiscal year 2010; and not more than 80% for payments due in fiscal year 2011. Proponents argue that local governments desperately need the \$1.3 billion in

reductions or property taxes will soar; however, opponents contend that the measure perpetuates the historic fiscal irresponsibility of leadership in Trenton. The Legislature will likely consider this matter once again when it returns from winter recess in January.

GOOD NEWS FOR NJ STARS

A bill supported by the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (NJ STARS) Task Force passed both houses on Monday, and is on the Governor's Desk awaiting his signature. ASSEMBLY, NO. 3373 (*Diegnan D-18*) would revise the NJ STARS programs to keep them more economically sustainable for the State of New Jersey, which awards over \$13.8 million per year in scholarships to outstanding high school graduates that continue their education at community and four-year colleges in the State. This bill would require scholarship recipients to graduate from high school in the top 15% of their class, pass a qualifying exam, take up to 18 credits per semester, and graduate from NJ STARS with a cumulative GPA of 3.25. Approximately 5,000 students currently participate in NJ STARS with enrollment expected to increase to 7000 by 2010. Governor Corzine is expected to sign the measure into law.

STATE HOUSE TRIVIA

Did you know that a bill becomes a law upon the Governor's signature or after 45 days if the Governor takes no action? Did you also know that a law takes effect on the day specified in its text, or if unspecified, on the July 4th immediately following its passage.

Hope you have a safe and happy holiday season!