



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE OF DELAWARE
411 LEGISLATIVE AVENUE
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901**

COMMITTEES
Administration, Chair
Ethics, Chair
House Rules, Chair
Legislative Council
Manufactured Housing

Chair Longhurst called the virtual meeting to order at 11 a.m. She stated that the meeting was planned in accordance with HCR 1 and took the roll call of the committee's members. Members present included Speaker Schwartzkopf and Reps. Mitchell, Dukes and Short. For a list of guests present, please see the speakers list below.

Chair Longhurst introduced **HB 240, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 31 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS AND APPROPRIATING GENERAL FUNDS TO THE STUDENT EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE FUND.**

Chair Longhurst, the sponsor of the bill, explained that the bill was inspired by New Castle County Police (NCCPD) Officer First Class Korey Thompson. Chair Longhurst stated that Officer Thompson had shared his story with her and brought attention to the issue of housing insecurity among college students when working together at the Police Athletic League of Delaware. She stated that students who are striving to be productive members of society should not have to struggle with housing, and that HB 240 would create the Korey Thompson Student Emergency Housing Assistance Fund for the benefit of housing insecure undergraduate students at any Delaware college or university. Chair Longhurst stated that the bill would appropriate \$90,000 to the fund for FY2022.

At the request of the Chair, Officer Thompson explained that he began to struggle with housing insecurity after his grandparents passed away and received assistance from his professor at Wesley College, Ms. Riddle; which allowed him to complete his education and get hired shortly after graduation. Officer Thompson stated that the State should inspire all individuals not to give up on their dreams, regardless of troubled situations or traumatic events.

Chair Longhurst thanked Officer Thompson for his testimony and opened the committee for comment.

Rep. Schwartzkopf thanked Officer Thompson for his work as a police officer who mentors children and for testifying before the committee. Speaker Schwartzkopf noted the importance of mentorship and individuals willing to help guide others in a positive direction. Speaker Schwartzkopf stated that he wished Delaware had 1,000 more police officers like Officer Thompson and willing to mentor children.

Rep. Dukes thanked Officer Thompson for his story and Chair Longhurst for honoring a living individual and police officer who is currently impacting the lives of Delawareans. He then asked about the fiscal note and if the bill would need to go to Appropriations.

Chair Longhurst said that the fiscal note was currently \$90,000 because a recent bill was passed that said anything under \$100,000 does not need to go to Appropriations.

Rep. Short stated that there was no funding for the bill listed for FY2023 or FY2024.

Chair Longhurst said that she had talked to the Governor's Office and the Delaware Housing Authority about appropriating additional funds through the governor and federal stimulus funding. Chair Longhurst explained that \$90,000 is a starting number for the Fund that she is working to expand the amount in the future.

Speaker Schwartzkopf stated that he had no doubt Chair Longhurst would keep the legislation funded and stated that he would help her.

Rep. Mitchell thanked Officer Thompson and asked that the bill be passed and continue to be funded in the future.

Dr. Tony Allen, President of Delaware State University (DSU), stated that Delaware State University had kept 200 students on campus during the pandemic because those students could not afford to go back to their communities. He stated that HB 240 exemplified the State putting funds to important issues by helping students who are trying to better themselves and their communities. Dr. Tony Allen explained that housing for in-state students ranges from \$7,000 to \$7,500 and of is often a main barrier for students from pursuing their degree at the institution.

Dr. Dennis Assanis, President of the University of Delaware (UD), thanked Officer Thompson for his testimony. He recounted an experience with a housing insecure student when he was a professor at the University of Michigan, and stated that during the pandemic, the Blue Hen Strong Fund had raised resources and spent between \$300,000 to \$400,000 on supporting students with similar obstacles discussed within the legislation. Dr. Assanis noted that more could be done to help students and that the bill would enable institutions to provide an even greater level of assistance.

Dr. Mark Brainard, President of Delaware Technical Community College (DTCC), offered his appreciation to Officer Thompson. Dr. Brainard explained that community college students are usually one decision away from being food and housing insecure. Dr. Brainard told a story about Vernell Brown, a gifted student who excelled at DTCC even as he struggled with homelessness, and thanked Chair Longhurst for bringing the issue to the forefront.

Chair Longhurst opened the meeting to public comment.

Robert Overmiller thanked the Chair and stated support for the bill.

Rep. Williams said she was in the meeting to speak on HB 193, but wanted to thank Chair Longhurst for bringing HB 240 forth and thank Officer Thompson for sharing his story and being a mentor and role model.

Fran Riddle stated that she was the professor that Officer Thompson had referred to during his testimony, and that while Officer Thompson would have succeeded without her help due to his hard work and determination, he also represents many students that hit roadblocks and need help along the way. Ms. Riddle asked the committee to pass the bill.

Chair Longhurst thanked Ms. Riddle for seeing the potential in Officer Thompson and said that the State of Delaware has benefited from his contributions.

Anas Ben Addi, Director of the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), thanked Chair Longhurst for her initiative and noted that the DSHA would be engaged in managing some of the funds in the legislation. Director Ben Addi stated that partnerships between the state and the education system were important in ensuring housing security for Delawareans.

A motion was made by Speaker Schwartzkopf and seconded by Rep. Mitchell to release HB 240 from committee: motion carried. Yes= 5 (Reps. Longhurst, Schwartzkopf, Mitchell, Short and Dukes). The bill was released from committee with a F=4, M=1, U=0 vote.

Chair Longhurst introduced **HB 224, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLES 6, 11, 18, 19, AND 25 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO DEFINITIONS.**

Chair Longhurst stated that she would run the bill for Rep. Johnson who was unable to attend the meeting. Chair Longhurst explained that the bill replaces HB 155 as a title change was required. Chair Longhurst explained that HB 224 makes the definitions of sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability consistent throughout the Delaware Code and with federal law.

Chair Longhurst opened the committee up to public comment.

Robert Overmiller stated that he was in support of the bill.

A motion was made by Speaker Schwartzkopf and seconded by Rep. Mitchell to release HB 224 from committee: motion carried. Yes= 5 (Reps. Longhurst, Schwartzkopf, Mitchell, Short and Dukes). The bill was released from committee with a F=3, M=2, U=0 vote.

Chair Longhurst introduced **HB 213, AN ACT TO AMEND THE CHARTER OF THE TOWN OF ELSMERE AND TITLE 21 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO A VOLUNTARY ASSESSMENT CENTER.**

Rep. Mitchell, the sponsor of the bill, explained that HB 213 amends the Charter of the Town of Elsmere and Title 21 of the Delaware Code to create a Voluntary Assessment Center and establish procedures governing the creation and operation of the Center. Rep. Mitchell explained that the assessment center would have jurisdiction over all breaches of the peace, offenses, and violations of civil or criminal ordinances committed within the boundaries of the town. Rep. Mitchell explained that the bill was brought forward by the Town of Elsmere, and stated that if an offender elects to waive the voluntary assessment, the case will be forward to the Delaware Justice of the Peace Courts. Rep. Mitchell noted that it was important not to confuse the assessment center with the Alderman's Court.

Chair Longhurst opened the committee up to public comment.

Seeing none, a motion was made by Speaker Schwartzkopf and seconded by Rep. Short to release HB 213 from committee: motion carried. Yes= 5 (Reps. Longhurst, Schwartzkopf, Mitchell, Short and Dukes). The bill was released from committee with a F=3, M=2, U=0 vote.

Chair Longhurst introduced **HB 193, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 16 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE DELAWARE STATE FIRE PREVENTION COMMISSION.**

Rep. Short, the sponsor of the bill, recognized co-prime sponsors Rep. Mitchell and Rep. Williams for their work on the legislation. Rep. Short explained the bill seeks to provide the State Fire Commission with the authority to hear and resolve disputes filed by members of the public or fire companies with respect to firefighting activities by individual firefighters and fire companies. He noted that there was an amendment to the bill that removes the immunity clause, and acknowledged that the bill was contentious

because it changes how the State Fire Commission operates. Rep. Short noted that the changes were necessary to address reported incidents and issues of non-compliance.

Speaker Schwartzkopf told Rep. Short that he had sent a concern by the president of a fire company and asked that he make sure to find common ground with him. Speaker Schwartzkopf agreed that the lack of a centralized entity charged with overseeing disciplinary action for incidents or noncompliance was problematic and that he would support the bill.

Chair Longhurst opened the committee up to public comment.

Rep. Williams thanked Rep. Short for bringing the bill forward and Mill Creek Fire company for speaking with her about the issue during the last several years. Rep. Williams stated that she would like to go on record that she received a letter of support from the New Castle County Fire Chiefs Association.

Fire Chief Nicholas Baronie, on behalf of the Mill Creek Fire Company, stated that he was in full support of the bill.

A motion was made by Rep. Mitchell and seconded by Rep. Dukes to release HB 193 from committee: motion carried. Yes= 5 (Reps. Longhurst, Schwartzkopf, Mitchell, Short and Dukes). The bill was released from committee with a F=3, M=2, U=0 vote.

Chair Longhurst introduced **HB 245, AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 29 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO REDISTRICTING AFTER FEDERAL DECENNIAL CENSUS.**

Speaker Schwartzkopf, the bill's sponsor, explained that HB 245 changes the deadline for the General Assembly to reapportion and redistrict the State after each federal decennial census to within 120 days, following receipt of the federal decennial census data for redistricting pursuant to Public Law 94-171. He stated that the bill would give the General Assembly a benchmark to have the redistricting done by November 7, 2021. Speaker Schwartzkopf noted that he would try his best to meet the deadline but that it would require a heavy lift by House attorneys and staff since all district lines would need to be defined. Speaker Schwartzkopf also noted the importance of completing the reapportionment and redistricting process as soon as possible so that it does not interfere with candidates who would like to run for office within their assigned district.

Chair Longhurst asked if the reapportionment and redistricting had to be completed and signed into law by November 7th.

Speaker Schwartzkopf replied yes, adding that it would require a lot of effort to complete and signed into law by the deadline.

Rep. Short stated that his main concern was the 120-day deadline and the residency issue which requires a candidate to live within their district for one year prior to running for office. Rep. Short asked if there would be an option to waive the residency requirements if the deadline is not reached.

Speaker Schwartzkopf replied that he would have the attorneys check in with the Delaware Supreme Court to see if there is any leniency on the issue. Speaker Schwartzkopf stated that a similar issue arose in 2002 when redistricting did not get signed into law until May but that he was not sure how the problem was resolved.

Chair Longhurst opened the committee up to public comment.

Sandy Spence, chair of the League of Women Voters Redistricting Committee, stated the bill was an effort to make state law consistent with the Constitution. Ms. Spence stated that she disagreed with the interpretation in the bill of when the 120-day period begins.

Speaker Schwartzkopf explained that there are areas within the Constitution that deal with redistricting that have been ruled as unconstitutional in prior years. Speaker Schwartzkopf explained that the language has not been removed and could be the reason for Ms. Spence's different interpretation regarding when the 120-day period begins. Speaker Schwartzkopf reaffirmed that the 120-day period begins once the state receives data from the federal government.

A motion was made by Rep. Mitchell and seconded by Rep. Short to release HB 245 from committee: motion carried. Yes= 5 (Reps. Longhurst, Schwartzkopf, Mitchell, Short and Dukes). The bill was released from committee with a F=3, M=2, U=0 vote.

Chair Longhurst adjourned the meeting at 12:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Myra Ray-Howett

Speakers List:

Officer Korey Thompson
Dr. Tony Allen
Dr. Dennis Assanis
Dr. Mark Brainard
Fran Riddle
Anas Ben Addi
Robert Overmiller
Nicholas Baronie
Sandy Spence