

Legislative-Advocacy Issues to Watch in the Upcoming 2024 Legislative Session

The Legislative-Advocacy Committee monitors legislation in Dover and Washington and advocates both for pending legislation and for issues important to SDARJ that should be addressed. Following are some of the important issues the legislature will be considering that will impact and advance the mission of SDARJ of ensuring racial justice and ending the corrosive consequences of racism.

The Committee continues to work with the Delaware Voting Rights Coalition of the ACLU to ensure not only that voting rights are not diluted in Delaware, but that access to voting is expanded. Our efforts this year will focus, among other things, on expanding access to polling places for the disabled, expanding early voting, ending permanent felony disenfranchisement, and ensuring that entities such as corporations do not gain the right to vote in municipal elections in Delaware. Legislation introduced last year to amend the charter of the City of Seaford to permit entities present in Seaford to vote in municipal elections passed. Since there were almost as many entities voting as residents, this diluted the voting power of the *human* population, affecting people of color. HB189 would prohibit municipalities from granting entities within their borders the right to vote. The Committee will be supporting this bill.

In the area of Criminal Justice, there will be a major push to pass the Probation Reform bill, SS1 for SB4, which passed the Senate last session but is stalled in the Appropriations Committee. Among other things, the bill prohibits the imposition of a condition of supervision that requires paying court fines, fees, supervision-related fees, and supervision-mandated programs, and requires the Department to not pursue sanctions for failure to complete a program when the costs were unable to be met, failure to follow conditions when mental health conditions prevent compliance, and failure to comply with broad conditions that are impossible to follow. The bill also would remove the penalty of incarceration for technical violations. All of these provisions would make it easier for probationers to comply with conditions while trying to find work in the outside world.

The Committee also supports HB267 and HB290, two bills that would assist formerly incarcerated persons in reintegrating into the community. HB267 would remove the penalties of incarceration and automatic driver's license suspension for failure to pay child support. The bill would require a hearing to determine whether such failure to pay was willful and to determine the child support obligor's ability to pay. The Committee also is following HB290, which would permit convicted felons to be eligible for the SEED program and to apply for tuition assistance.

Environmental issues also disproportionately impact people of color, indigenous people, and people of low income. The Committee is working with the Delaware Environmental Action Coalition to pass a Healthy Communities bill, which would require DNREC to assess the cumulative impact of a proposed industry or building application on these groups and would

require DNREC to deny a new permit or a permit renewal application if certain conditions are not met.

The Committee continues to work with the Reproductive Advocacy Alliance of Delaware to advance legislation that benefits women's reproductive health, again an area with a disproportionate effect on women of color in Delaware. Work continues on HB110, which would provide Medicaid Funding for Abortion and would require private insurance companies to cover abortion.