General Law Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 25, 2019

10:00 AM in Room 2D of the LOB

The meeting was called to order at 11:35 AM by Chairman, Rep. D'Agostino M. 091.

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Fonfara J. S01; Kissel J. S07; Leone C. S27; McCrory D. S02; Witkos K. S08

Representatives: Ackert T. 008; Allie-Brennan R. 002; Altobello E. 082; Arconti D. 109; Candelaria J. 095; Candelora V. 086; Cheeseman H. 037; D'Agostino M. 091; D'Amelio A. 071; Gibson B. 015; Luxenberg G. 012; Orange L. 048; Rutigliano D. 123

Absent were:

Senators: Bradley D. S23

Representatives:

Representative D’Agostino welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited members of the committee to make remarks.

BILLS FOR REVIEW
S.B. No. 647 (COMM) AN ACT STREAMLINING THE LIQUOR CONTROL ACT. (GL)

PROPOSED ACTION: JF TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Senator Leone to JF to the floor, the motion was seconded by Representative Altobello.

Senator Witkos described this bill as a continuing work in progress, but once completed it will be a bill that everyone will be proud of. This bill will be a total comprehensive rewrite of the liquor statute in Connecticut and asked for support in voting it out of committee.

Senator Kissel stated that he would be voting no on this bill due to the complexity of the three-tier system and was not comfortable with the direction that the committee was going in terms of liquor regulations.

Representative Candelaria expressed support for the bill to be voted out of committee although he has concerns about the impact it can cause the industry.

Senator Leone expressed support for the bill knowing that it is a work in progress and improvements can be made as it reaches the floor of the House and the Senate.

Representative Orange also expressed support for SB 647 on the condition that it is a work in progress and will continue to improve as the session goes on. Representative
D’Agostino thanked Senator Witkos for his hard work on this bill and stated that it is much needed in order to streamline the Liquor Control Act.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE: 16 AYE, 2 NAY, 1 ABSENT

H.B. No. 5267 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR REIMBURSEMENT TO RETAIL DEALERS OF POWER EQUIPMENT. (GL)

PROPOSED ACTION: JF TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Senator Witkos and seconded by Representative Orange to JF to the floor.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE: 18 AYE, 0 NAY, 1 ABSENT

H.B. No. 7183 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR WHOLESALER PERMITS. (GL)

PROPOSED ACTION: JFS TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Senator Leone and seconded by Representative Altobello to JFS to the floor.

Representative D’Agostino began discussion in regards to this bill by stating that the statute has not changed in 40 years. Representative D’Agostino proposed a friendly amendment to line 51 of HB 7183.

The motion for the amendment was made by Senator Leone and was seconded by Rep. Altobello. A voice vote was held on the amendment and all were in favor.

Representative Cheeseman had concerns about the bill despite the amendment; she felt that it was too premature for the committee to involve themselves in any agreement between wholesalers and distributors.

Representative Candelora discussed the Craft Breweries displeasure with not being able to get out of their contracts, but is not willing to undergo changes that upends 95% of the liquor industry in the state.

Representative Orange had reservations about the bill as it is and reserves the right to vote differently on the floor if changes are not made.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE: 10 AYE, 8 NAY, 1 ABSENT

H.B. No. 7184 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE LIQUOR CONTROL ACT. (GL)

PROPOSED ACTION: JFS TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Senator Leone and seconded by Representative Altobello to JFS to the floor

Representative D’Agostino stated that this bill is a work in process and will not affect current minimum bottle laws or pricing. For new liquor store permits the ratio will change from 1 in every 2,500 residents to 1 in every 5000 residents, and current permit holders are preserved in the value of those permits and can transfer freely.

Representative D’Agostino presented an amendment for line 85 of the bill which deals with the case price language.
The motion to pass the amendment was made by Senator Leone and the second was made by Representative Altobello. A voice vote was held and all were in favor.

Representative Rutigliano expressed opposition to the bill because a vehicle for an alcohol bill was just passed in the form of SB 647. He also expressed concerns that if one were to buy a package store and have to apply for a new liquor permit they would be under the new permit restrictions.

Senator Witkos stated that he would vote HB 7184 out of committee and there are some portions of the bill that he agrees with and some that he doesn’t.

Representative Orange stated that there are some portions of the bill that she does not support and reserves the right to vote no once the bill is on the floor, but will vote it out of committee.

Representative Ackert expressed opposition to the bill and felt that there needs to be more dialog on the ratio changes and other areas of the bill.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE: 12 AYE, 6 NAY, 1 ABSENT

H.B. No. 7287 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE MEDICAL MARIJUANA PROGRAM. (GL)

PROPOSED ACTION: JFS TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Representative Altobello and seconded by Representative Candelaria to JFS to the floor.

Representative D’Agostino discussed the bill and the proposed changes such as opioid addiction being a condition that can be treated with medical marijuana as well as changes to the fee structure to the program.

Senator Witkos spoke of eliminating application fees for the medical marijuana program because $25 is not cost prohibitive. Senator Witkos stated that a panel of medical experts rejected opioid addiction as a debilitating disease, and was inclined to listen to them

Representative Rutigliano stated that there is a process in place that decides what qualifies for the program and is in agreement with the doctors that testified at the public hearing.

Representative Candelaria stated that he supports the bill because it can accomplish some good for those who are addicted to opioids according to studies.

Senator Leone endorsed the bill as a way to provide treatment to opioid addicted individuals in order to keep them from going to the black market.

Representative Luxenburg supported the bill in order to reduce the abuses of big pharma through the marketing of opioids.

Senator Kissel helped to craft original medical marijuana legislation and felt as though the program is too expensive. He stated that he believes that Connecticut has the best medical marijuana program in the country in its current form.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE: 11 AYE, 7 NAY, 1 ABSENT
H.B. No. 7371 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RETAIL SALE OF CANNABIS.  
(GL) 

PROPOSED ACTION:  JFS TO THE FLOOR

The motion was made by Representative Candelaria and seconded by Representative Allie-Brennan to JFS to the floor.

Representative D'Agostino provided a description of the bill in addition to the changes made. He stated that there is more work to be done as far as revisions go.

Senator Witkos expressed concern about the equity application portion of the bill in regards to who can receive a license.

Representative Cheeseman has no problem with record expungement, but is opposed to the equity application language. She cited statistics from Colorado since they legalized marijuana and stated that she will be voting no.

Representative Candelaria discussed the negative impact that the marijuana black market has had a devastating effect on African American and Hispanic communities. He supported the equity language in order to give all individuals an opportunity.

Senator Kissel expressed concern about the increase of marijuana experimentation and combining marijuana with alcohol which can lead to fatalities.

Representative Allie-Brennan stated that this bill is geared towards adults only and was in agreement with the equity language and will support.

Representative Candelora had concerns with the commercialization of marijuana and the possibility of it being marketed to children. He also had opposition to the equity language and will not support.

Representative Luxenberg supported the equity language and stated that the current marijuana laws are racially harmful and have racist origins.

Senator McCrory expressed his concern that the bill does not go far enough to repair the original racist intent of the marijuana laws. He felt that it is time to correct a law that has harmed families and communities.

Representative Gibson felt that there is still work to be done in regards to this bill but it is a step in the right direction and will support.

MOTION WAS PASSED ON A ROLL CALL VOTE:  10 AYE, 8 NAY, 1 ABSENT

A motion was duly made by Representative Altobello and seconded by Representative Candelaria to adjourn the meeting. Votes will be held open until 4 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 1:36 PM.

Jeff Lucas
Administrator

Jeff Lucas
Committee Clerk