

★ ★ Amanda ★ ★
BATTEN
DELEGATE

April 16, 2021



Dear friends,

Last week, the General Assembly reconvened (virtually in the House; in-person in the Senate) for the 2021 “veto session.” The term is a misnomer this year, as the Governor did not veto a single bill. Instead, the legislature considered gubernatorial amendments to legislation passed during the regular session.

By far, the most controversial and headline-grabbing policy change was the legalization of marijuana. Earlier this year, on a party-line vote, the legislature passed a voluminous bill to ultimately legalize marijuana and impose a social justice-drive framework for the licensure of cultivation and sales. Originally, legalization was not slated to transpire until 2024 and would have occurred in conjunction with rules regarding the production and sale of cannabis.

Thanks to the Governor’s amendment, possession of marijuana will now be legal on July 1, 2021. Possession of up to one ounce will be fully legal, and possession of up to one pound will be punishable by a mere \$25 fine. **SALES** of marijuana, however, will remain illegal. The utter lack of logic in this structure is mind-boggling. Are we to believe that altruistic marijuana dealers will suddenly begin donating their product to consumers on July 1?

If you plan to avail yourself of this new freedom, beware of the strings attached. Only “sealed manufacturer’s containers” of marijuana are allowed in vehicles. Since there are no manufacturers yet, there is no such thing as a “manufacturer’s container.” It’s best to plan to walk with your marijuana. (If you’re walking in public, just be sure you’re not smoking or offering your marijuana to others.) As a reminder, you can’t purchase marijuana—you’ll need to convince someone to give it to you as a gift. You’re welcome to also grow up to four of your own plants...but don’t forget that it remains illegal to purchase a plant or seeds. Again, you’ll need to receive these as gifts. Beware also that your plant does not produce

more than an ounce (or pound if you're willing to pay the \$25 fee) of marijuana. Otherwise you are still breaking the law...maybe. No one really knows if the "home grown" provision trumps the one-ounce rule.

Oh, and one final reminder: in 2024, Virginia's issuance of licenses to legally cultivate, sell, or otherwise transact marijuana business will prioritize individuals who have prior marijuana convictions. If you'd like some light reading, the final bill, House Bill 2312, weighed in at 283 pages (the longest bill any legislator can recall).

The Virginia Parole Board's "wand of power"

The Virginia Parole Board (Board) controversy is well documented and has been covered in-depth by the media. The former Board chair blatantly violated internal Board policy as well as Virginia law and the Commonwealth's constitution. She not only offered early release to inmates without first notifying their victims, but she also unilaterally freed offenders from parole supervision. In the Parole Board chair's exact written words to a subordinate (typo included) as reported by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Waive that wand of power and let's cut them loose."

These findings were noted by the Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) and revealed by a whistleblower within the office. In return for her effort to disclose wrongdoing, the whistleblower was lauded by the Governor.

Just kidding. The whistleblower was fired.

Then, after months of uproar, the Governor wisely decided to investigate the Parole Board to weed out corruption.

Sorry, still kidding. During the reconvened session, the Governor instead asked for a budget amendment to fund an investigation of the Investigator General's office.

In short: corruption by the Governor-appointed Virginia Parole Board was discovered by the Office of the Inspector General (who, in yet another twist, also reports directly to the Governor). When an OSIG staff member revealed the wrongdoing, the whistleblower was fired and the Inspector General's office will now be investigated.

Issues *ACTUALLY* affecting Virginians

Under this rare heading, schools in many parts of Virginia remain partially shuttered while students' academic and social-emotional metrics plummet. House and Senate Republicans pushed to allow families the option to return to the classroom full-time beginning now. Notably, many localities—particularly those in other states or in rural areas where online learning is not an option—have been open full-time and operating safely since the beginning of the school year. If those districts can find a solution, so can localities in Virginia.

Rather than encourage this outcome, a watered-down version of a “return to school” bill was passed, and the Governor failed to offer an amendment to make it immediate. Translation: on July 1, schools need to offer in-person education...but there’s no real guarantee that anything will change.

Stay in touch!

With the legislative session truly behind us (well, maybe...there are rumors swirling of a special session), I am busy on the campaign trail. Now that many folks have their vaccines and some restrictions are lifting, I've been enjoying visiting with businesses and individuals throughout the 96th District. Stay tuned for details about upcoming events!

As always, please do not hesitate to contact my legislative office for assistance with any state-related matter or agency. My office is located at 7405 Richmond Road in Williamsburg and can be reached by phone at 757-741-7001 or by email at DelABatten@house.virginia.gov. (For campaign-related matters, please send all correspondence to info@amandabatten.com).

Have a wonderful weekend!



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