

# Howard council votes to table bill banning guns in county buildings

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**T**he Howard County Council has put on hold a bill that would ban guns in county buildings.

Councilmembers voted unanimously Monday night to table the bill, which is sponsored by Democrats Calvin Ball, Jen Terrasa and Jon Weinstein and would prohibit guns in county-owned buildings. The legislation makes exceptions for active and retired police officers, as well as people who need to carry guns while on county business, such as armored vehicle guards making a delivery.

Ball said after the voting session that giving the bill some extra time creates "an opportunity to continue having a community conversation about the issues raised."

At a public hearing on March 16, supporters and opponents of the bill offered dueling arguments about the bill's merit; supporters said it would create a safer environment in county spaces, while opponents argued that people intent on committing a violent act would ignore the law.

Two amendments to the bill have been filed since it was introduced. The first, from Republican Councilman Greg Fox, would create an exemption for concealed-carry permit holders, except in buildings equipped in metal detectors, and would require the county to install a metal detector at its Ellicott City headquarters by the end of 2017. The amendment would bring Howard's practices closer with those in place at the state capitol in Annapolis, where weapons are banned and visitors must pass through metal detectors at the building's entrance.

"I was trying to put as much on the table to make sure I understood what the concerns were on the other side" instead of "kicking the can down the road," Fox said after Monday night's session.

Fox also worked with Weinstein on an amendment that would create an exception for museum curators and historic re-enactors, and would ensure that county employees who need to carry a weapon while on the job can do so.

The bill, as amended, is expected to come up for a vote at the council's next legislative session on May 4.

## **Human rights bill gets a second public hearing**

Councilmembers decided to give another controversial bill an extension Monday night.

The original legislation, which was proposed several months ago by Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman, would have requested a report examining the Human Rights Commission's case load and considering passing the duty of adjudicating human rights cases to a hearing examiner, among other changes.

Since then, however, the bill has been stripped of its most significant changes. What remains are updates to the county code that would change the terminology used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and

people with disabilities to bring it up to date with each community's preferred terms.

Because the bill has changed quite a bit since it was originally introduced, councilmembers decided it warranted a second hearing.

The council's next public hearing is scheduled for April 20 at 7:30 p.m .

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