

# Howard council passes bill banning guns in county buildings

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**T**he Howard County Council on Monday voted to approve a bill that effectively bans concealed-carry permit holders from bringing guns into county buildings.

The bill, co-sponsored by council Democrats Calvin Ball, Jen Terrasa and Jon Weinstein, prohibits everyone but police officers and those who are permitted to carry a gun while on county business from carrying weapons into the George Howard complex in Ellicott City and on other county property.

The council approved the bill by a 4-1 vote.

Councilman Calvin Ball praised the new law as "common sense" and "a positive step for the county.

"I think that it's our responsibility to ensure as safe a gathering place as possible where the community does the community's business," Ball said, "and I am pleased that we came together and worked on a piece of legislation that will move public safety forward."

Meanwhile, Republican Councilman Greg Fox, the lone dissenter, said the gun ban made him feel "less safe."

Fox said the bill would be ineffective because the county won't be able to prevent anyone intent on committing a crime from entering a building armed.

Fox suggested exempting concealed-carry permit holders from the bill until the county could develop new safety protocols and install a metal detector at its headquarters. A later amendment removed the safety protocols and metal detector requirement; that passed but the concealed-carry exemption failed.

"Especially as you're seeing more things happen around the country with people, whether it's a gun, a knife, or something else – we haven't done anything to secure things from people who are intending to do harm. Therefore, I'm not sure how we could be safer," he said.

As of Tuesday, it remained to be seen whether County Executive Allan Kittleman would veto the bill. At a community town hall in Oakland Mills in March, Kittleman said he wanted to see an exception for concealed-carry permit holders added to the bill.

Andy Barth, a county spokesman, said Tuesday that the county executive was reviewing the bill and would make a decision "next week."

## Two bills off the table

Two more controversial bills finally made it off the table Monday night.

One, initially intended to restructure the county's Office of Human Rights and Human Rights Commission when it was introduced in February, passed three months later in a significantly watered-down version.

All references to restructuring were removed from the legislation the council passed unanimously May 4. This Human Rights bill simply updated the county's charter with terminology preferred by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

The bill was tabled in March after commission members complained they had not been involved in conversations about possible changes; Kittleman and his aides insisted they had.

A resolution that had been put on hold for even longer than the human rights bill also got unanimous approval.

Legislation to reappoint land-use lawyer Bill Erskine to the Howard County Economic Development Authority's board of directors was introduced in July but tabled after a group of Howard County citizens involved in an attempt to take a handful of zoning decisions to referendum testified against Erskine, who represented developers with properties put in limbo by the referendum effort.

The referendum group especially objected to Erskine's decision to subpoena many of their members; Erskine maintained the subpoenas were critical to building his case and said the issue was separate from his tenure on the board, which is prohibited from participating in the zoning process.

Barth said Kittleman has known Erskine "for a long time, and while they may not always agree on everything, he's not concerned about Mr. Erskine serving on the economic development authority board."

### **Budget legislation**

The council also introduced budget-related legislation Monday, and scheduled three extra voting sessions in case they aren't ready to reach a decision on the budget by May 20, the scheduled budget adoption date.

Some other proposed legislation, including requests from Kittleman for the council to approve sales of four county properties including the Columbia Flier building, was not introduced.

The council wanted to keep the focus on budget legislation this month, Council Vice Chairman Jon Weinstein said.

"We were kind of inundated with legislation with the budget coming up," Weinstein said, and didn't want the property disposal requests and other legislation to get "buried."

Barth said Kittleman still plans to file a budget amendment to show revenue from the property dispositions, which he estimated at about \$4 million in total. He "would like to see the council act on the resolutions," Barth said.

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