Bills & Regs

HOUSING Only a few tenant landlord bills have surfaced so far. The good cause for eviction bill, S1259 (also H1131), is back again this year. Others are S1290 which protects tenants against landlord reprisals and Rep. Paul White's H1693 which limits tenant access to escrow accounts... The Commerce & Labor committee held a hearing on security deposits on Feb. 22... Two MHFA bills of interest are S1285 (H1130) which would require tenant membership on the MHFA board and H1134 which requires the MHFA to finance 2500 housing units per year.

This year's public housing refiles include DCA's H16, extending rental assistance leases, H540 which requires chronological listing of applicants and at least two bills requiring more security in projects... Others include: H15, DCA's bill to train public housing tenants to perform maintenance tasks; S1292, requiring DCA to administer rental assistance programs where local housing authorities do not; and H107, establishing an Indian Housing Authority.

Two other bills that will be heard during March are S1286 (H1046) which would provide benefits to tenants relocated for code violations and H18, DCA's proposed revolving loan fund to cities and towns.

WELFARE The Human Services Committee will consider two important General Relief bills- One would repeal most of the cutbacks made in 1975 and another would phase in eligibility by age of recipient over a three year period...

FOLLOWING LEGISLATION

The problems of bills not being available and the shortness of this year's legislative session have combined to create a chaotic committee hearing situation. Staffers will not have time to analyze many new bills before they are heard. Hearings normally held over a two month period are being crammed into three weeks. And some bills may not even be in print when they are scheduled to be heard.

This means that oral testimony on new bills will be particularly important, since the normal communication between committee staff and advocates will not occur in the usual manner. Preparing supportive printed material, as well as fact sheets, for distribution to committee members is advisable.

It will also consider two sliding fee scale programs: S451 would set up a demonstration program for day care services to working parents and the other would eliminate the absolute financial ceiling on home care eligibility... Sen. William Bulger has filed a bill, S477, to increase the personal needs allowance for medicare nursing home residents from $30 to $40 per month, an effort which failed last year.

Other bills that would liberalize benefits include S480 which would permit courts to order the Welfare Department to make payments in lieu of AFDC "care and protection" temporary custody cases, S527 that would make SSI recipients eligible for food stamps, and another which mandates annual cost of living increases for welfare recipients.

The Health Care Committee will hear a bill, H176, filed by the Welfare Department to "improve the administration of the Medicaid program." In an election year, this could prove to be controversial.

HEALTH Very little else new or controversial is expected this year in the health field. Two possible exceptions are Health Committee chair Louis Bertonazzi's certificate of need appeals procedure bill, H1993, and a bill being drafted by the Public Health Department regarding licensing of clinics that would redefine the word "clinic"--a result of last year's controversy over abortion clinic licenses... Two issue areas that have numerous bill offerings again this year are patients rights and lead paint.

YOUTH Many observers are doubtful that anything will happen this year in the area of children's reorg. With Ways & Means chair John Finnegan "holding the cards," it appears unlikely that he will have time to concentrate on his special commission's recommendations (expected in March) until the legislative segment of the budget process ends... Meanwhile, Youth Services Commissioner Jack Calhoun is going ahead with a mini-reorg study, the adolescence task force which is supposed to systematically compare what should exist with what does in state agencies. Calhoun hopes to extablish a set of principles by which services can be judged.

OTHER On March 8, the Education committee will hold a hearing on school financing reform, an issue which could be of great importance to low income people... Community Action Programs in New England will oppose the proposed transfer of winterization programs from the federal Community Services Administration to the new U.S. Department of Energy because DOE will not provide funds to administer the program... CAPs along the coast worked around the clock during the storm doing everything from providing emergency vouchers to printing food stamp application forms for the Welfare Department. At the time, it was not known how many of the expenses would be reimbursed, but the Community Services Administration has agreed to repay the CAPs in full.

Administration Sets Economic Development Priorities

The Dukakis Administration will "push hard" for legislation to create the Mass. Industrial Finance Agency (MIFA), according to Manpower Affairs Secretary Howard Smith. Also to be sought is the creation of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corp. (CEDAC). On the other hand, the Technology Development Corp.(TDC) legislation is being given low priority and the administration is going to "forget about" the Mass. Industrial and Community Development Agency (MCIDA) for now, according to the Secretary.

Smith said he recognized the need for immediate technical assistance to community groups and that he and Office of State Planning Director Frank Keefe would be developing a proposal to the Economic Development Administration for federal technical assistance funds. In the meantime, Smith said he would decide soon on whether or not it is possible to fund some initial technical assistance effort immediately out of CETA discretionary funds. This is particularly important since the Community Development Finance Corp. will begin accepting proposals from community groups on or around April 1 and will, according to the soon to be published CDFC handbook, "work with business owners and community leaders to create eligible [community] organizations" where ones don't exist. Advocates fear that without technical assistance, some of these so-called "community groups" receiving CDFC loans will be controlled by the businesses they are in "partnership" with.

BEACON HILL UPDATE **617-482-2540**

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Speaking of...

the blizzard, again: the only judges to trudge out to hold bail hearings for alleged looters were JOHN CRATSLEY, MARGARET BURNHAM and JAMES DOLAN, each of whom has aa legal services or poverty law background ... Childrens reorg chair FLORENCE RUBIN recently reassured DYS Commissioner JACK CALHOUN by saying "You'd be crazy to want to merge with Mental Health," as some have proposed ... Is DPH Commissioner JONATHAN FIELDING on the way out? One high administration source thinks "recent reports are somewhat exaggerated" since fielding reportedly turned down a similar job in New York State recently ... Next question: why have the First National, State Street and Shawmut Banks all tried to close branches recently in older Boston neighborhoods? One state official suggests that these federally chartered banks may be trying to close their doors to avoid the reporting requirements of the new federal Community Reinvestment Act. The attempted closings all took place after the Act was passed, but prior to the promulgation of the regulations. According to the Act, banks must indicate that they are servicing their urban area customers as a prerequisite for suburban expansion ... Page 39 in the Human Services section of House One, the Governor's proposed budget, contains the following line: "The Work Experience Program is scheduled to begin early in 1978, and will focus *initially* on placing approximately 1600-2000 unemployed fathers on AFDC into jobs and training programs." Human Services Secretary JERALD STEVENS says he didn't include the word "initially" in his draft of the budget narrative and thinks it was added by Governor's aide PETER TROPP ... The Administration is having trouble filling the "public interest" slot on the Capital Resource Company, the sweetener to last year's life insurance tax concession. PETER BROOK, author of the controversial New England Regional Commission Report on Massachusetts' capital gap, declined the job and JAMES BAILEY, who orchestrated the still more controversial 1975 bond sales, was rejected on the grounds that he's too involved with other state business ...