

AARP Blacksburg

May 2015 Legislative Report by Val Coluni and Alison Galway

Ethics Reform: Ethics reform passed in special session approving, among others, the \$100/year aggregate gift cap, a definition of “widely attended events” to not include entertainments, include an executive branch representative appointed by the governor and allow former, not just retired, judges on the ethics council. The GA rejected amendments, among others, concerning travel expense for official public business and disclosure exemptions, broader definitions of personal friend and immediate family, and a process for random inspections of disclosure forms.

Redistricting: Correction to April 2015 report. All six bills AARP supported asking for independent redistricting died in House committees. The Governor vetoed several local redistricting bills as unconstitutional in timing mid-Census.

Transparency Virginia is a volunteer coalition of 29 non-profit groups with the goal of increasing public participation in government by more transparency and accountability in the governing process: timely access to scheduled committee meetings, recorded and published votes on all bills. The legislative Calendar provides some information on committee meetings and hearings, but these can be cancelled without notice or others scheduled and held at the last minute. 76% of bills were killed in committee or subcommittee, often by unrecorded voice vote, reassigned and never placed on an agenda, or never got a hearing at all.

WIN Voting Machines have been decertified by the Virginia Board of Elections due to potential security problems with the wireless feature and the lack of a paper verification of individual votes. Montgomery County has most precincts already using Op-scan paper voting and should be able to cover all precincts by November 2015 elections.

Senior Citizen Scams: The latest scam is calls suggesting that the recipient is in violation of some law and must give out information and/or pay a fine immediately. Do not do this. All government agencies correspond by written letter, never demand payments over the phone or by email, and never ask for your identifying information.