



## The Star-Ledger

### Action in Trenton

## Anti-corruption bills advance in Senate

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A package of anti-corruption bills that would increase penalties for misuse of public resources and provide a way to reclaim lost funds due to corruption was unanimously approved yesterday by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

The first bill (S1192), sponsored by Sens. Ellen Karcher (D-Monmouth) and John Adler (D-Camden), would create the crime of corruption of public resources. The bill would make it a crime to knowingly misuse public grants, loans, assets or property for purposes other than the intended governmental purpose.

The second bill (S1318) would allow the attorney general to seek monetary penalties from those convicted of public corruption crimes, such as fraud and bribery. The penalty, which would be reimbursed to the public entity that had been defrauded, would be in addition to any other penalties the person may face because of public corruption.

"New Jersey's taxpayers have paid the price for rampant corruption and fraud in government," Karcher said. "Millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted enriching corrupt and unscrupulous individuals who abuse the public trust."

Both bills now head to the full Senate for consideration. Exempting club dues

from state sales tax The Assembly Appropriations Committee approved a bill yesterday to exempt health and fitness club dues and public parking fees from the state sales tax.

Sponsored by Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew (D-Cape May), the bill would exempt initiation fees, membership fees and dues charged by health and fitness, athletic, sporting or shopping clubs from the state's 7 percent sales tax.

It also would clarify the Legislature's intent to exempt all public parking and garage fees from the sales tax. The language was included after the Division of Taxation's rules on metered municipal parking did not cover some long-term public parking.

"While modernization of the state's sales tax is necessary, care must be given to ensure residents are not adversely or unfairly impacted," Van Drew said. "Exempting residents from artificially increased health club dues and public parking fees is part of the process of ensuring the sales tax is reasonably and evenly applied."

The bill was approved 12-0 and now moves to the Assembly for a vote. Ensuring the safety

of day-laborer vans A bill that is part of a legislative package to increase the safety and security of commuter van services used by many day-labor employers was approved yesterday by the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee.

Sponsored by Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-Middlesex), the bill (A2987) would require the Department of Banking and Insurance to conduct a feasibility study concerning the lowering of insurance costs in New

Jersey for vehicles that transport passengers for hire.

"Over 12,000 people are riding to and from work in commuter vans that are grossly unsafe," Wisniewski said.

The package of bills was developed after news reports in 2004 that uncovered serious concerns regarding the safety of the van fleets that shuttle low-income day laborers to and from work. Nearly 97 percent of the 209 commuter vans pulled over for safety spot checks were in violation of state registration and licensing regulations or simply deemed unsafe to drive.

The bill now moves to the full Assembly for consideration. Making state buildings

meet 'green' standards New state buildings would have to be designed to meet national Green Building energy conservation performance standards under a bill approved yesterday by the Senate Economic Growth Committee.

Sponsored by Sen. Fred Madden (D-Gloucester), the bill (S843) would require that any state building 15,000 square feet or larger be managed with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design guidelines. LEED is the nationally accepted standard for regulating "green" buildings.

"This legislation would allow the state of New Jersey to set a positive example for residents by ensuring that state buildings are environmentally friendly," Madden said.

Buildings are considered "green" if they meet enhanced standards in the areas of sustainable site planning, safeguarding water quality and increasing water use efficiency, energy efficiency and renewable energy, conservation of materials and resources and indoor environmental quality.

The bill now goes to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for consideration.

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