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[...] ethics reform won't wither

Changes waiting for review by House committee

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An attempt to bring ethics reform to the state's House of Representatives is currently sitting idle, but state Rep. Jim Lyons says he and other state Republicans won't give up on bringing such changes to Beacon Hill.

Following a third consecutive state Speaker of the House being convicted of a felony, Lyons and Rep. Paul Adams, Andover's two state representatives, are joining other Republicans in battling what Adams says is an "institutional" problem in the state's government.

"The last three Speakers of the House were convicted on federal criminal charges. The problem in the Speaker's office is institutional," Adams, who represents the 17th Essex district in the House of Representatives, said via email. "The objective of the Republican rules proposal is to prevent unethical or criminal conduct from happening, and to bring more accountability and transparency to the legislature."

The proposed reform would change a number of ethics rules in the House that Lyons and Adams said would hold legislators to a higher standard of ethical conduct than presently prescribed by statute.

The rules may have met an early grave, however. When it came up for discussion a few weeks ago, the House's leadership moved the bill on to the House Committee on Rules, which is not likely to take action on the bill, according to a press release from the Massachusetts Republican Party.

"House Democrats rejected the Republican proposal during a House session on (July 20)," Adams said. "There was brief debate, but the rules were rejected along party lines."

While reform is waiting to be taken up by a committee, Lyons said that won't stop representatives from bringing the issue up in the future.

"We voted to continue to bring this up every month until the House leadership allows us to have a fair and sound debate," Lyons said. "We are hopeful that it gets out of rules committee and gets to the floor."

RULES ADDRESS "CULTURE OF CORRUPTION"

Lyons said that the legislation "represents a significant change to what has been going on on Beacon Hill."

"It is one of the things I ran on, the culture of corruption on Beacon Hill," Lyons said. "It's time to change the mentality on Beacon Hill. It's about public service, not private enrichment."

Joining Lyons and Adams on the reform was House Minority Leader Bradley Jones, and Rep. Dan Winslow from Norfolk, who both led the movement to bring the reform forward. All four legislators are Republicans. The House of Representatives has 32 Republicans, out of 160 total members.

When previously reached for a comment, state Sen. Barry Finegold of Andover — a Democrat who served in the House of Representatives for year until he was elected to the Senate last fall — declined to comment on the specifics of the legislation.

"It is a House bill, and the House has to deal with it," Finegold said.

"I'm open to any legislation that has the potential to improve the legislative body," he said.

Last month former House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi was found guilty on seven of nine counts in his public corruption case, including conspiracy, mail fraud, wire fraud and extortion. Thomas Finneran, pled guilty in 2006 to obstruction of justice regarding his testimony during redistricting litigation. Charles Flaherty pled guilty to tax evasion in 1996.

PROPOSED ETHICS CHANGES

Andover state Reps. Jim Lyons and Paul Adams support an ethics reform proposal supporters describe as having six goals:

Forbidding House members and staff from contacting public entities regarding pending procurements before an award decision is made;

Limiting members and staff to written recommendations for job seekers in the public sector unless the employer initiates contact;

Creating an ethical duty for members and staff to report any unethical or criminal conduct by any other members or staff;

Prohibiting lobbyists from entering the House chamber and the members' lounge, and requiring them to wear a visible badge identifying them as a lobbyist;

Creating detailed disclosure requirements in the event a member or staff member is arrested, indicted or charged with criminal offenses, or named as a defendant in a domestic violence restraining order;

Preserving the right of members and staff to have private lives, provided that the private conduct doesn't become public or otherwise bring the House into public disrepute.

<http://www.andovertownsmen.com/local/x850290444/Andover-Rep-Lyons-vows-ethics-reform-wont-wither>