

Curran faces full probe

Committee will hire
independent counsel
for its investigation

Focus on business dealings

Democratic delegate
asked to respond to
allegations in writing

By WILLIAM F. ZORZI JR.

SUN STAFF

The legislature's ethics committee decided yesterday to move forward with a full investigation of Del. Gerald J. Curran's business dealings and hire an independent counsel to lead the probe.

After meeting a second day for more than an hour in closed session, committee members said they would have a letter hand-delivered to Curran, a Northeast Baltimore Democrat, and ask him to respond to a list of possible ethics infractions.

"We determined there are potential violations of the ethics law," said Sen. Michael J. Collins, a Baltimore County Democrat and co-chairman of the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics.

Collins refused to make known the contents of the letter or detail how many possible violations the 12-member committee would be examining.

Curran was not in Annapolis yesterday and did not return telephone calls to his home and office.

The committee's investigation stems from articles in *The Sun* this week that reported that Curran, an insurance broker, has developed potentially lucrative arrangements with state offices and private enterprises with issues pending before the committee he has headed.

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Ethics committee launches full investigation of Curran

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newspaper reported that Curran drew on his contacts in state government — including then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer and Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein — while he pushed an insurance program for the University System of Maryland's 30,000 employees. That deal could net him tens of thousands of dollars in broker's fees.

The paper also reported that Curran did not disclose to the ethics committee that he was collecting commissions as an insurance middleman for one of the state's largest credit unions while heading the committee that considers legislation crucial to the institutions.

Collins said the panel reached its decision to investigate Curran by "applying the ethics law to those facts" in the newspaper articles.

He also said the committee wanted to again hire Jervis S. Finney, former state senator and federal prosecutor, to lead the Curran investigation. Finney played the same role for the committee in its investigation of former Sen. Larry Young, who was ousted by the Senate last month after the panel found he had violated ethics laws.

House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. said that he and Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller had agreed to approve the committee's request to hire Finney.

The committee asked Curran

to provide a written response to the allegations by 5 p.m. Tuesday, Collins said. Curran also was asked to appear before the committee Feb. 23 to answer questions.

The panel has set aside next Thursday for other witnesses, Collins said, but he declined to say whether Schaefer or Goldstein would be among them. He did say the panel has contacted the University System of Maryland and insurance companies for information.

Curran, 58, temporarily stepped aside as chairman of the House Commerce and Government Matters Committee this week.

He has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing and said he plans to appear before the committee to answer any questions that have been raised by the articles.

Collins said that the committee was concerned about the March 2 deadline that was imposed by Taylor and Miller when the presiding officers ordered the panel to take up the Curran case.

Unlike the Young investigation, which was concluded before the legislature convened Jan. 14 for its 90-day session, the committee members now must balance the ethics panel's schedule with those of their other committees in the Senate and House. The legislative session concludes April 13.

The committee "will not be hindered by an artificial deadline" in its effort to be "thorough and fair," Collins said.