

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed House Bill 152.

By Chapter 784, Acts of 1973, the General Assembly provided for the State's assumption of the assessment function, which, up to then, had been a county responsibility. The State assumption of this function was phased in over a three-year period, beginning with the annual salaries and incidental expenses of the supervisors of assessments effective July 1, 1973, the annual salaries and administrative costs of the assessors effective July 1, 1974, and all remaining costs relating to personnel, administration, operation, and maintenance of the assessment system effective July 1, 1975.

Sections 246B, 246C, and 246D of Article 81, as added by Chapter 784, provided, as to each category of employee (supervisor, assessor, and clerical) an election either to remain in the local merit, health benefit, and retirement systems or to join the State merit, health benefit, and retirement systems. If they elect to join the State systems, the Act provides that they shall be placed in a position most closely comparable to their former position, "without diminution or loss of any benefits" to which they were formerly entitled.

Either not considered with respect to Chapter 784 or, in some instances, arising after its enactment was the fact that in fifteen subdivisions, these employees were entitled to participation in group life insurance provided as a fringe benefit by the subdivisions. Shortly after the implementation of Chapter 784 commenced, a question arose as to whether the State had the obligation of either replacing that life insurance benefit or reimbursing the subdivisions for their cost in maintaining it.

On May 9, 1974, the Attorney General ruled that the locally provided life insurance benefit was not an obligation assumed by the State. Thus, any assessment office employee who elected to join the State systems would lose the life insurance benefit, and, for those employees who opted to remain in the local system, the cost of that benefit would continue to be borne by the subdivision.

House Bill 152, as introduced, amended those sections enacted by Chapter 784 dealing with the transfer of assessment employees to provide that employees electing to remain in the local system could continue to receive the life insurance benefits provided by those systems, with the State bearing the expense of these benefits. The bill was amended to provide further that employees electing to join the State systems would also