

One Maryland vote slated in House

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CUMBERLAND — Final House votes for the One Maryland bills developed by House Speaker Casper R. Taylor could be taken by the end of the week and the bills would then be sent to the Senate for action, Taylor said.

Hearings are also scheduled Wednesday for Senate versions of the legislation.

The One Maryland bills seek to provide a revolving loan fund and tax credits to help economically distressed subdivisions to build industrial sites that can attract jobs. The goal is to help the counties and cities to gain enough fiscal health so they will no longer need special state help.

The Ways and Means and Economic Matters committees have amended the bills to add Caroline County to join Allegany and Garrett counties, Baltimore City and the Eastern Shore counties of Worcester, Dorchester and Somerset as eligible distressed subdivisions.

A county's One Maryland plan will not be accepted for funding if it excludes projects for any of its municipalities, Taylor said.

That amendment was affixed to head off a call from the Maryland Municipal League and others that cities be able to individually qualify for One Maryland money instead of working with counties as envisioned by bill authors.

The Maryland Economic Development Corp. also will be asked to manage the revolving loan.

MEDCO Executive Director Hans F. Mayer said the group has

experience with similar funds to help distressed subdivisions.

He thinks the General Assembly will reduce the revolving loan fund from the \$40 million initially requested by bill supporters. "I don't think the \$40 million will happen. The state will want to get it going and see what happens first," he said.

Taylor said distressed-area residents share chronic unemployment and other problems caused by the long-term, high-rate joblessness and the inability of the county or municipal governments to pay to clear land and install utilities so that companies can move in.

The unemployment has caused many young people to flee the distressed areas to search for work. Yet many Allegany and Garrett County people steadfastly refuse to leave because of other factors such as the area's quality of life, Taylor and Delegate George C. Edwards told the House Economic Matters Committee.

Sen. John J. Hafer, R-Allegany-Garrett, said he has invited Allegany and Garrett county commissioners and Chamber of Commerce executives and other local people to testify at the Senate hearings.

The state's chief economic developer and other Glendening administration staff will also speak in favor of the bills.

"We're serious about this," Hafer said.

Hafer said committee deliberations will be important because he has heard that some Prince George's and Montgomery County cities will ask that they be declared eligible for One Maryland assistance.

Some of the same issues will be raised in the House too, he

predicted.

Taylor hopes to build more support by holding a One Maryland summit Saturday morning at Salisbury State University at the Eastern Shore.

Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and Comptroller William Donald Schaefer and Taylor will address at least 100 people, said Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce Director Brad Bellacicco.

Townsend aide Chuck Porcari said the lieutenant governor will present the keynote address.

The three were invited by the Eastern Shore delegation and Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce.

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