

lief, veto overrides (i.e., “Kirwan” education reforms and funding), sports betting (approved by the voters in the last election), and police reform.

Of course, as they say, “all politics is local,” and Maryland horse people can be affected by actions at an even more local level, i.e., the counties. To the extent our resources permit, the MHC Government Relations Committee can work at the county level as well as the state level. Maryland has 24 local jurisdictions, each of which operates under one of three different forms of governance. The three forms are code counties, code home rule counties, and charter counties.

CODE: Code counties are governed by a board of elected county commissioners, which in turn appoints a County Administrator to run day-to-day operations. Code counties have limited legislative authority, and the State General Assembly has the full power to legislate for the county. In code counties, the county delegations to the General Assembly (i.e., the elected Delegates and Senators for that county) play an especially important role in setting county law. The six code counties are Calvert, Carroll, Garret, St. Mary’s, Somerset, and Washington.

CODE HOME RULE: Six counties have adopted “code home rule.” Code home rule counties are also governed by boards of elected county commissioners and a board-appointed county administrator, but they have broader legislative authority than code counties. The General Assembly cannot make local law in a specific code home rule county; instead the General Assembly can make laws that applies generally to all code home rule counties only. The six “code home rule” counties are Allegany, Caroline, Charles, Kent, Queen Anne’s, and Worcester.

CHARTER: Charter counties, of which there are 12, have an elected county council as well as an elected executive. Nine of them elect a council and a separate executive, two of them elect a council that also acts as the executive, and Baltimore City has an elected city council and mayor. Charter counties have the broadest authority over local law of the three forms of governance. The General Assembly can legislate only in the specific, and narrow, areas expressly set out in the county’s charter. The 12 charter counties are Anne Arundel, Baltimore County, Baltimore City, Cecil, Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, Talbot, and Wicomico.

The Government Relations Committee adapts its processes to each of the three different forms of local governance. To the extent our resources permit, we monitor the county councils of the charter counties quite closely, as many of them have broad jurisdiction over land use, agriculture, open space issues, and, recently, the pandemic response. We monitor the boards of commissioners in code home rule counties for local zoning and animal control issues. And in code counties, we monitor the local bills introduced in the General Assembly by the county delegations (as we do for all counties). We encourage all our members to familiarize themselves with their county’s form of government and its leaders and processes, and to be MHC’s eyes and ears on the ground, to assist us in monitoring developments at the local level. With your help, we can ensure that our members get the information they need, in a timely manner, to have an impact on local decisions that affect our lives, our horses, our businesses and our farms.

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