

# Talbot urges delegates to drop backing for ER bills

By **TRAVIS DUNN**  
Staff Writer

**EASTON** — The Talbot County Council has formally requested that Dels. Jeannie Haddaway, R-37B-Talbot, and Adelaide Eckardt, R-37B-Dorchester, drop their sponsorship of two bills that could affect the future of the Memorial Hospital at Easton.

The council sent identical letters to each delegate on Feb. 27.

The letters ask the delegates to withdraw their sponsorship of House Bill 1074, which could make it easier for Shore Health System to locate a hospital in Queen Anne's County. The bill would repeal the certificate of need requirements for health care facilities except for home health agencies and hospices. HB 1074 is the House version of Senate Bill 628, introduced by Sen. E.J. Pipkin, R-36-Upper-Shore.

"Even though Delegate Eckardt has indicated that the intent of (HB 1074) was not to impact the possible relocation of Memorial Hospital at Easton, Senator [Richard] Colburn indicated in his recent *Star Democrat* column that this legislation could facilitate the move of the hospital out of the municipal limits of Easton," the council wrote.

The council also requests that the delegates drop their support of HB 1219, which would exempt a possible "free-standing medical facility" in Queen Anne's County from several regulatory hurdles. Some Talbot County critics fear this bill could allow portions of the Memorial Hospital at Easton to relocate without any public comment. HB 1219 is a companion to an emergency bill (SB 750) introduced by Pipkin.

"We are even more distressed to learn of your sponsorship of HB 1219..." wrote the council. "This legislation directly impacts the possibility that Memorial Hospital at Easton, or parts thereof, will

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be relocated to Queen Anne's County. We hereby formally request that you also withdraw your sponsorship of HB 1219.

"The County Council respectfully suggests that you seriously reflect upon the possible implications of both these bills, and, as our (representatives), be unwavering in your support of keeping Memorial Hospital intact within the municipal limits of the Town (of Easton)."

The council also voted last week to team up with the Town of Easton to hire a lobbyist to modify SB 750. Talbot County and Easton each will spend \$25,000 apiece to hire the lobbyist.

Eckardt said she understands the Talbot County Council's concerns, but she does not think the bills she has sponsored will affect Memorial Hospital at Easton. Larger, statewide health care issues are at stake, she said.

"The Talbot situation is not what this is all about," she said. "People have made connections with things that don't have anything to do with each other."

HB 1074, on which she is the lead sponsor, is part of a package of four bills that propose to make sweeping changes to the state's health care system. She said this package is among several proposals for a "health care for all" program. Her proposals are more business-friendly, she said, and she, Pipkin and other legislators have been developing them for several years. A hearing for HB 1074 will be held March 8.

Eckardt, however, is not optimistic that either HB 1074 or HB 1219 — the bills the Talbot County Council is concerned about — are likely to pass. But she thinks that key components could be incorporated into the final health care reform bills that do pass.

She also wonders whether hiring a lobbyist by Talbot County and Easton was necessary.

"My sense is they could just save their money and sit tight," she said. "But you do what you have to do, and what you believe is in the best interest of your citizens."