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TENNESSEE GOVERNMENT UPDATE

NEWS FOR THE CLIENTS AND FRIENDS OF BASS, BERRY & SIMS PLC

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Although the beginning of the regular session of the Tennessee General Assembly is still a few days away, the Senate and House Education committees have been busy this week addressing legislation that would delay merger of Memphis and Shelby County Schools to the start of the 2013-14 school year. Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris and Rep. Curry Todd – both Republicans from Collierville – have sponsored the bill that would lift the prohibition on the creation of special school districts and municipal school districts in Shelby County if the voters in the City of Memphis approve the March 8 referendum transferring administration of the Memphis City Schools to the Shelby County Board of Education.

Democrats opposed the bill's provisions that would allow for the creation of special and municipal school districts and attempted to amend the bill to give Memphis additional representation on the transition planning commission that the bill creates upon referendum approval. Democrats also questioned the urgency with which the bill was being pushed through committee – but to no avail. After passing in both Senate and House committees with votes along party lines, the bill will be considered for floor votes in the Senate on Monday night and the House next Thursday. Richard Locker of the *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis has more on the legislative status and the Memphis City Council's response.

Governor Haslam held public budget hearings with his new cabinet, department by department, this week. All the hearings can be reviewed on archived video tape online. The commissioners were asked to suggest ways to cut one to two percent from current budget levels. The commissioner of general services suggested purchasing more fuel efficient cars. The commissioner of corrections suggested early release of state custody convicted felons. The commissioner of mental health suggested that cuts to his department would be akin to chopping off a finger. One could hardly disagree that painful cuts are certain for most departments.

Finally, we are pleased to congratulate our good friend and former colleague Leslie Hafner, who will be joining Governor Haslam's team as chief legislative liaison. Fittingly, her first day in the new position will be on Monday when the legislators return to Nashville for the beginning of regular session. After serving in former Governor Sundquist's administration, Ms. Hafner joined Bass, Berry & Sims as director of

government affairs in 2003. She will be taking a leave of absence from her lobbying firm to be at the forefront of the governor's legislative office. Governor Haslam is fortunate to have a veteran lobbyist of Ms. Hafner's character and work ethic on his team. We wish her the best in her new position.

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