

## School Regionalization Reports Finally Available

Two school regionalization reports are now available to the general public that have been the subject of multiple press accounts over the last several weeks and were heavily referred to in Governor Baldacci's "State of the State" address on Tuesday night this week.

One report is entitled the "Report of the School Administrative Unit Task Force". This task force was a 13-member working group created by the Legislature. The second report is entitled the "Task Force on Increasing Efficiency and Equity in the Use of K-12 Education Resources". This task force was a seven-member group appointed by Governor Baldacci, including representatives of the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Maine Educational Policy Research Institute and the University of Maine.

The recommendation of both groups are coordinated and share the same eventual finding – the state should (1) financially support the regionalization of smaller school systems into bigger school districts and (2) reduce the number of school boards in Maine. The reason for these changes, both reports claim, is because bigger school districts and less school boards will result in lower per-pupil costs.

The analysis in the two reports that supports this central finding is grounded in the same type of analysis that has been supplied for several years by David Sivernail of the Maine

Education Policy Research Institute (which is the research arm of the State Board of Education), Philip Trostel of the University of Maine's Margaret Chase Smith Center, and Suzan Cameron of the Department of Education. The analysis categorizes all

school systems in Maine into a number of categories, either by size or governance structure, and reports their costs according to a dollar-per-pupil measure.

The reports do not provide the method of their analysis, so it is not clear what costs are included or not included in their calculation of per-pupil-costs. Also, the reports do not indicate if they exclude any "out-

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### Status of Tax Reform Compromise

By Chris Lockwood, MMA Executive Director

As reported in the November, 2003 *Maine Townsman*, MMA and the Maine Education Association, a principal partner in Citizens to Reduce Local Property Taxes Statewide, accepted Governor Baldacci's invitation in mid-November to bring together proponents of Question 1A and 1B in an effort to develop a compromise school funding and tax reform proposal to present to the Legislature. The parties involved in the negotiations have been representatives of the Governor, MMA, MEA and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce.

The discussions continued through the holiday period, with the up and down swings associated with difficult negotiations. Essentially the focus of the negotiations was to blend elements of the 1A and 1B proposals. In early January it appeared we had reached general agreement on the key issues, including FY 05 funding for General Purpose Aid to Education (GPA) as part of a ramp-up to 55% State share of funding public education based on the Essential Programs and Services model; however, as we moved to the important step of drafting detailed language for consideration of the Legislature, it became apparent there was not an agreement on a pivotal issue – namely, the inclusion in statute of the funding for the remaining years of the ramp. From the perspective of MMA and MEA, this statutory commitment is an essential component of ensuring property tax relief for Maine citizens and the fulfillment of the State's longstanding promise to fund public education.

Given the lack of an agreement, members of the Coalition are shifting their focus to preliminary planning for the June 8 runoff election on Question 1A, The School Finance and Tax Reform Act of 2003. If an acceptable agreement were to be reached and enacted by the Legislature this session, this would have an important influence on the campaign for the June 8 ballot measure election in terms of conveying to voters the action of the Legislature to address these longstanding tax policy and education funding issues.

## REPORTS (cont'd)

lier” data samples (for example, the per-pupil costs of extremely small or isolated school districts) that would skew the results. Also, the reports do not recognize or attempt to account for a much more powerful factor that predicts per-pupil costs than the governance structure of a school system. That factor is the school system’s wealth.

Without a more detailed understanding of the analytic methods employed and not employed, it could be suggested that the analysis upon which these reports depend needs some further testing before a “correlation” is broadly represented as a “cause”. Maine’s School Administrative Districts (SADs) were created forty years ago largely in the more rural areas of Maine where there is typically less property wealth behind each student. The reports are now attributing those district’s lower per-pupil costs on the sole basis that they are SADs without accounting for their relative fiscal capacity compared to the fiscal capacity of school systems that are organized differently.

A summary of the two reports’ several recommendations are:

1. School unions must convert into school districts, with the local school boards dissolving into regional boards.

2. Smaller school systems should be aggregated into bigger SADs. Newly-formed SADs with enrollments between 1,000 and 2,500 will be rewarded with bonus state subsidy of a 7.5% increase in annual General Purpose Aid to Education

subsidy (GPA) for a 5-year period. The state would also take over 25% of the school’s debt service obligation for capital construction debt that the state had previously refused to support.

Newly-formed school districts with enrollments over 2,500 students would get a 10% GPA “bump” for a 5-year period and the state would take over 50% of non-state supported construction debt.

3. Transportation costs should be brought within the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) school funding model in a manner recommended by David Silvernail. The mechanics of the Silvernail model are hard to briefly explain but it appears to be based on some per-mile base cost of school bus operation that is factored according to the road-miles in the school system and student road-mile population density. Accordingly, the transportation model appears to functionally consider such local costs as sports-related, extra-curricular transportation as “non-essential” and therefore not deserving of any state financial support.

4. A model to ascribe each school

system’s allowable special education costs should be moved into the EPS model, but the report provides no specifics regarding the design of the model.

5. The existing program cost circuit breaker in the GPA distribution model should be “modified”. “Program costs” are a school’s transportation, special education, vocational education and early childhood education costs. Under current law, any school system’s exposure to those elements of the budget is capped according to a specified maximum mill rate effort. The report provides an analysis which suggests that “low receiver” school systems, that do not get much financial assistance from the state for regular operational expenses, are getting a disproportionate amount of assistance from the state because of the circuit breaker; and the equity of special education services is jeopardized. The specific “modifications” to the circuit breaker system the task force is considering are not revealed.

If you would like a copy of these reports, please contact MMA’s Laura Veilleux at 1-800-452-8786 or [lveilleux@memun.org](mailto:lveilleux@memun.org).

## Action Alert on Unfunded Mandates

On Wednesday this week, members of the House tabled a discussion and final vote on LD 419, *An Act to Repeal Outdated and Unfunded Municipal and Educational Mandates*.

The bill initiated by Rep. Sawin Millett (Waterford) and fully developed by a minority membership of the State and Local Government Committee would create a twelve member commission charged with identifying and examining the need for the state mandates placed on municipalities, counties, schools and other quasi-municipal districts. Membership of the commission would include legislators, state agency commissioners or their designees, and municipal, county, school and district officials. The commission would have until November 3, 2004

to submit a report to the Legislature detailing its recommendations for repealing unnecessary mandates and for streamlining and reducing the cost of those mandates determined to be necessary.

Members of the House need to know how important this bill is to towns, cities and schools. Please contact your legislators today and ask them to support the minority “ought to pass as amended” report on LD 419.

MMA would like to thank Rep. Millett for sponsoring the bill as well as State and Local Government Committee members Senator Gilman and Representatives Bowen, Crosthwaite, Peavey-Haskell and Sukeforth for moving this important municipal issue forward.

### Legislative Bulletin

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**Editorial Staff:** Geoffrey Herman, Kate Dufour, Jeff Austin, and Laura Veilleux of the State & Federal Relations staff.

# Licensing of Home Building Contractors Voted Down

The Legislature's Business, Research and Economic Development Committee (BRED) held its second work session Tuesday on LD 1551, *An Act to License Home Building and Improvement Contractors*. Despite MMA's vote to endorse the bill, the Committee voted 9-2-1 to kill it. State reasons for opposition were: licensing is not necessary, licensing will not address the problems as they are currently understood, and licensing will be too expensive.

However, there is interest among Committee members to review a state-wide building code. The Committee voted to support LD 1025, *An Act to Ensure Uniform Code Compliance and Efficient Oversight of Construction in the State*, a carryover bill from the first session. However, the bill voted upon Tuesday was a new draft that did not resemble the original LD 1025. The original bill established a new "state office of codes," required all construction be in compliance with the code, and required inspections by state licensed inspectors. MMA's Legislative Policy Committee voted to oppose LD 1025 as it was originally printed last session.

The amended version of LD 1025 does three things: First, it establishes the 2003 International Code Council codes, both commercial and residential, as the model codes for Maine; second, it limits future adoption of codes by municipalities to only the model code (but it requires no adoption at all and has no pre-emption of existing codes), and third, it only allows local amendments to the model code that are more restrictive than the model.

There are several problems with this third provision. First, there is no clear standard for determining what is "more restrictive" when comparing building codes. Second, no agency is given responsibility for making that determination, thus it will fall to the courts, which is unap-

pealing. Lastly, this provision could easily be interpreted to mean that deletions from the code will be prohibited.

Building codes have thousands of directives and the town meetings or councils frequently elect to delete entire sections of the building codes they adopt due to unreasonably demands on enforcement costs or local opposition to enforcement of those sections. As an example, provision AH 107.3.2 of the proposed model residential code has a directive on what the screen density shall be for screened-in porches. The voters in most municipalities will not want their code enforcement officers wasting time on everyone's back porches measuring the thickness of screens. Instead, municipalities would delete the whole section. Again, these deletions are likely to be viewed as making the code "less restrictive" and therefore prohibited. It is pretty clear that if the Committee is serious about this bill it will need to remove this third provision.

Some Committee members, in supporting the concept of a "code bill", indicated that they wanted to further discuss some issues. They were not clear as to what these issues were. However, the white elephant issue for this bill is its choice of the ICC codes rather than the NFPA codes, which are supported by the fire fighting community.

A building code working group, which was composed primarily of the building community – architects, engineers, builders etc – voted to support the ICC during its meetings this summer. The Maine Building Officials and Inspectors Association, a code enforcement officer group, supports the ICC as well. The firefighting community does not. While MMA's LPC did not vote on this bill because it did not exist in this form, the LPC did vote to support LD 1551 which used the ICC's

residential building code as its model.

MMA will update *Bulletin* readers on building code policy development as the BRED committee continues its work on these issues in the weeks ahead.

## New Property Tax Exemptions by the Batch

The Taxation Committee held public hearings on three bills on Wednesday this week that would each exempt a little more property from taxation. All the normal dynamics were in place: the requested exemptions were small, incremental expansions of existing exemptions; the new exemptions were defended on the basis of equity and "tax fairness"; and MMA made the request that no new exemptions be considered until the Legislature shows a willingness to engage in comprehensive tax reform.

The MMA request was an effort to avoid any further nibbling away of the municipal tax base in the isolated context in which exemption requests are always considered, without at least trying to restore balance, equity and fairness to the whole tax code. It is unclear if the MMA request had any impact on the Committee.

One of the bills, LD 1674, *An Act To Expand Property Tax Exemptions to Cooperative Housing*, would expand the veterans' property tax exemption to provide a benefit to veterans in cooperative housing. In cooperative housing, the entire cooperative owns the real estate and the individual residents own shares of the cooperative. The resident veterans would like to be provided the veterans exemption that they would be eligible for if they owned a home, but the bill does not explain how their benefit would be calculated and

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# Just One More Request

On Wednesday of this week, the State and Local Government Committee held a public hearing on LD 1780, *An Act to Promote Transparency in Budgeting*.

The bill, sponsored by Speaker of the House Patrick Colwell (Gardiner), would require municipalities to submit a copy of the municipal budget to the State Planning Office (SPO) every year for the purpose of allowing SPO staff to make that financial information available on the Internet. Any municipality failing to submit a copy of the budget would become ineligible to receive state revenue sharing.

Speaker Colwell testified that LD 1780 is necessary to provide residents with one easy place to locate data on municipal spending without having to spend hours searching for the data and spending money on photocopies. The intended purpose of the bill is to provide access to all and allow for the sharing of ideas from community-to-community. Speaker Colwell also believes that by making every community's budget available in one location, residents will learn how municipalities spend revenue, understand why property taxes are so high, and learn to appreciate the good efforts of the local officials.

As is our custom, the Maine Municipal Association informs sponsors of MMA's opposition to a bill prior to the public hearing. Knowing the municipal position on the bill, Rep. Colwell also informed the Committee that the unfunded mandate issue would be identified as a problem with the bill. He also stated that he did not truly understand the mandate claim, but if it boiled down to the 37 cents necessary to mail the budget documents to the state, he would be willing to pay for that cost.

The only other proponent of the bill was the State Planning Office's John Del Vecchio, who testified on behalf of the Baldacci Administration.

The Administration supports the bill because it "seeks a way to make

essential information about municipal budgets easily accessible to the public by using today's modern technology." However, he did concede that it would be challenging to implement this effort and the bill might need to be modified before it is finally enacted.

Del Vecchio told the Committee that SPO was under the impression that the budgets would be sent to SPO in electronic format. If he's right, then the administrative costs to municipalities would far exceed the insignificant mailing cost Rep. Colwell assumed constituted the unfunded mandate claim.

Paul Bowen, Penobscot selectman, made the 100-mile journey to Augusta to express his opposition the bill. Mr. Bowen testified that in order to get the type of information the sponsor was requesting, some entity, either the state or municipalities, would be exposed to significant costs. In order to make "apples-to-apples" municipal budget comparisons, either the state would have to sort through municipal budgets to find common elements or municipalities would be required to fill out financial surveys. In Penobscot, which is primarily run with volunteers, the very few paid staff already have too much to do. They could not complete another state mandated task.

Mr. Bowen also opposed the element of the bill that linked failure to submit the budget with a loss of revenue sharing, as it strongly suggested municipalities did not deserve the relief revenue sharing provides.

MMA also provided testimony in opposition to the bill for many of the same reasons.

First, municipal officials believe that the data requested is already being provided to the state. According to state laws, municipalities are required to annually submit a copy of the municipal annual report to the Department of Audit and the Maine State Librarian. Each town report must include an audited financial report that includes information on municipal revenues and expenditures.

Second, without clearly defining the kind of financial information the Legislature is seeking, municipal officials believe the results will vary from municipality-to-municipality. Some communities might send a copy of the warrant, others a copy of the audit and still others might provide printouts with extremely detailed municipal financial information.

Third, municipal officials believe that the Legislature should encourage the SPO staff to focus on existing priorities rather than ask the staff to do more. In the past few years municipalities have had to wait longer and longer periods of time before receiving state certification of their comprehensive plans. Often, these municipal officials have been told that the delays are due to the amount of work the State Planning Office must accomplish.

Fourth, from the municipal perspective, linking a \$109 million property tax relief program to the submission of budget documents that are effectively already submitted to the state is disproportionately punitive, especially when that action will have a direct impact on municipal budgets.

Finally, municipal officials believe that if the intent of LD 1780 is to require every municipality to transcribe its budget documents according to a particular form or process, the implementation of the mandate could increase the costs of municipal administration.

Michael Huston, Oxford town manager, provided testimony "neither for nor against" LD 1780. Mr. Huston felt that it would be wrong for municipal officials to be against the concept of the bill since all of the actions of local government should be transparent. However, he did identify several problems with the bill including, where the state would find the funds to pay for the implementation of the new program, how and what type of data would be collected, and how the data would be posted. Mr. Huston also questioned why school and county budgets were not being requested.

The Committee's initial reaction to the bill is difficult to read. Some members are very interested in the con-

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# Criminal Justice Committee Update

“Splitting the baby” is a phrase that describes the process used when a decision maker cannot choose between the options presented. In this situation rather than choosing one side over the other, the decision-maker creates a third alternative that tends to benefit both parties, but does not completely satisfy either.

At its work session last Friday, the Criminal Justice Committee “split the baby” on two issues of municipal interest.

Under Title 32, section 82, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel are required to be licensed by the Emergency Medical Services Board. As a requirement of licensure, EMS personnel must complete and submit an application to obtain a new license or renew an existing license. Since October 1, 2003, the EMS Board has required applicants to submit payment for the cost of the \$15 criminal conviction background check conducted for all license requests.

LD 1788, *An Act to Waive Fees for Background Checks for Certain Emergency Medical Services Personnel*, sponsored by Rep. Harold Clough (Scarborough), sought to relieve local government from paying this mandatory fee to the state by waiving the \$15 background check on municipal and volunteer emergency medical services personnel.

MMA supported the bill because the new EMS Board policy on background checks shifts the cost of a state board requirement onto municipalities. Municipal officials believe that if the state board finds it necessary to mandate repeated and ongoing criminal conviction background checks for municipal employees, then the state should pay for that expense.

During the work session, the Committee struggled between their interest in providing relief to EMS personnel from the background check fee and a concern over stepping on the toes of the EMS Board. Some members of the Committee were interested in amending the bill so that the applicant would

need only pay for the initial background check and the cost for subsequent background checks, if conducted, would be borne by the state. Other members of the Committee wanted to provide the EMS Board an opportunity to address the issue on its own.

In the end, the Committee voted unanimously that LD 1788 “ought not to pass” and decided instead to send a letter to the EMS Board requesting that it consider eliminating or waiving the fee for the subsequent background checks conducted for license renewals. The Committee suggested that if the Board does not respond appropriately, then legislation would be submitted this session to address the issue.

The Committee also voted unanimously that LD 1789, *An Act to Revise the Minimum Firefighter Safety Standards*, “ought to pass as amended”.

As described in detail in the January 16th edition of the *Bulletin*, LD 1789 would place an unfunded mandate on municipalities by establishing that at a minimum all firefighter turnout gear in current use meet or exceed the 1987 National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Municipal officials were primarily opposed to the bill because it would shift additional costs to communities and the existing laws regarding the quality of turnout gear are appropriately protecting firefighters.

Although the Committee was unwavering in their support for the bill, they did recognize the financial implications on municipalities. With that in mind, the Committee amended the bill to allow municipalities to prepare for the new mandate by postponing the effective date of the bill to July 1, 2005.

## EXEMPTIONS (cont'd)

how the benefit of the exemption would be provided to them, since the exemption could only be provided to the entire cooperative. Apportioning that benefit to the correct shareholder would be up to the internal workings of the cooperative.

Another of the exemption bills, LD 1794, *An Act To Expand Maine’s Homestead Exemption for the Blind*, would extend the exemption for the blind to a blind person who is living in property whose ownership is governed by a “revocable living trust”. The trust in these cases is often the original owner’s children and the terms of the trust include what is often referred to as a “life estate”, which is more or less a formal agreement that the parent can possess the home for the remainder of his or her life.

The third exemption bill, LD 1735, *An Act To Repeal the Taxation of Personal Property Valued at \$1,000 or More*, would repeal the personal property tax on “individually-owned” personal property. The law has long held that items of personal property owned by individuals, not used for commercial or industrial purposes, and valued at more than \$1,000 is taxable. Few municipalities aggressively assess residentially-owned personal property. LD 1735 would exempt all individually-owned personal property from taxation. The Legislature actually repealed this tax several years ago but immediately reinstated it when it learned that the state would be legally responsible under the terms of the state’s Constitution for reimbursing municipalities 50% of the revenue that the municipality would lose because of the newly-created exemption. To avoid that reimbursement obligation, some members of the Taxation Committee discussed the Legislature’s option of putting this proposal out to the voters as a constitutional amendment rather than enacting it as mere statute.

There is nothing new about a legislative interest in enacting or expanding property tax exemptions. One exemption often leads to the next under the “fairness” arguments that are always advanced. At the end of the day, all of this “fairness” leads to unfairness as the property tax base becomes narrower and narrower, which drives the tax rate all-the-higher for those people who aren’t given exemptions by Augusta.

# Personal Information About Municipal Employees

State law protects state workers from the public release of the employee's home address, telephone number and other pieces of personal information or personally-identifying information that might be on a resume, job application or other public document. That same protection is not provided to municipal employees or the employees of other local government entities. Senator Ethan Strimling (Cumberland County) is seeking to rectify that situation and create a parallel public policy that protects all government employees from the inappropriate release of an employee's personally-identifying information regardless of the level of government (local, regional or state) where that person is employed.

LD 1727, *An Act To Amend the "Freedom of Access Laws" To Exclude Public Employees' Home Addresses*, was given its public hearing last week and was further worked on by the members of the Judiciary Committee on Thursday this week, but it still needs some more work before it is reported out to the full Legislature. Senator Strimling's bill would amend Maine's Freedom of Access law (sometimes referred to as the "Right to Know" law) to clarify that a governmental employee's home address is not a "public record". In practical terms, the bill would allow the supervisor of the municipality's records to black out the home address of an employee as it might appear on a document that is otherwise a public record and is being requested under the Freedom of Access law. The job application or resume of an employee who has been hired by the town or city is generally speaking a public record and can be legally reviewed, inspected or copied by anyone under the terms of the Freedom of Access law.

There are times when municipali-

ties get requests for that type of information from a person who makes it clear or otherwise implies that he or she wants to continue an argument or take up a disagreement with that employee at the employee's home after hours. In those cases, municipal officials having custody of the records are inclined to delete the personally-identifying information from the otherwise public record before providing it to the person who is requesting the information, but there is no authority in law for those municipal officials to do that.

At the public hearing last Wednesday, MMA was surprised to learn that none of this personally-identifying information with respect to state employees is "public information" under current law but there is a gap in that law which does not provide the same protections for local government employees. Ignoring the double standard, the Maine Press Association testified that there are "adequate laws" to protect people from harassment and so this change to the Freedom of Access law was not necessary.

There seems to be clear interest on the part of the Judiciary Committee to harmonize and equalize the public policy with respect to all levels of government. If the public policy is to make the employee protections generally uniform across all levels of government, the question is where in Maine law to place those protections. To some it makes sense to provide that exemption directly in the Freedom of Access law where municipal officials often turn for guidance. To others it makes more sense to put the exemption in municipal law under the "personnel records" statute.

On Thursday, the Committee tabled the bill while it waits a week or so for the more comprehensive

recommendations regarding changes to Maine's Freedom of Information Act. Those recommendations will be presented by the *Committee to Study Compliance with Maine's Freedom of Access Laws*, a working group created by the Legislature last spring as a result of the Maine Press Association's November, 2002 "audit" of freedom-of-access compliance by local governments, schools and police departments.

## Supplemental Budget "Change Package"

Last week's *Bulletin* reported on Governor Baldacci's proposed supplemental budget to address state shortfalls related to the state's MaineCare (Medicaid) program.

One element of that proposed budget would amend the General Assistance laws to change the reimbursement formula in a way that would adversely effect the 15 municipalities in Maine that have disproportionately large General Assistance programs, in most cases in their role as regional providers. Specifically, the Governor was proposing to eliminate the heightened (90%) state reimbursement obligation that covers a municipality's disproportionate costs. The base reimbursement formula calls for a 50:50 state-local obligation.

A "change package" presented to the Appropriations Committee by the Baldacci Administration on Tuesday this week retracted the proposal to amend the General Assistance reimbursement formula.

## ONE MORE (cont'd)

cept of consolidating municipal data, but through the use of existing sources or in a voluntary manner. Other members expressed concerns with the penalties associated with the failure of submitting the budget. Still other members held their opinion of the bill to themselves.

A work session on LD 1780 is scheduled for February 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS

*NOTE: You should check your newspapers for Legal Notices as there may be changes in the hearing schedule. Weekly schedules and supplements are available at the Senate Office at the State House and the Legislature's web site at <http://www.state.me.us/legis/senate/Documents/hearing/ANPHFrame.htm>. If you wish to have updates to the Hearing Schedules e-mailed directly to you, sign up on the ANPH homepage listed above. Work Session schedules and hearing updates are available at the Legislative Information page at <http://janus.state.me.us/legis/lio/>.*

### *Monday, January 26*

**Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**  
**Room 206, Cross State Office Building, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1312**

LD 1693 – An Act To Improve the Property Boundary Marking Laws for Purposes of Timber Harvesting. (Sponsored by Sen. Bryant of Oxford County; additional cosponsors.)

LD 1742 – An Act To Amend the Laws Regarding Humane Agents and Dog Licenses. (Sponsored by Rep. Smith of Monmouth.)

**Utilities & Energy**  
**Room 209, Cross State Office Building, 10:30 a.m.**  
**Tel: 287-4143**

LD 1672 – An Act To Amend the Charter of the Dover and Foxcroft Water District. (Emergency) (Sponsored by Rep. Annis of Dover-Foxcroft; additional cosponsor.)

### *Tuesday, January 27*

**Insurance & Financial Services**  
**Room 427, State House, 1:00 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1314**

LD 1665 – An Act To Require Owners and Operators of Snowmobiles and All-terrain Vehicles To Carry Liability Insurance. (Sponsored by Rep. Collins of Wells; additional cosponsors)

**Judiciary**  
**Room 202, Cross State Office Building, 1:00 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1327**

LD 1765 – An Act To Clarify the Responsibilities under the Adult

Protective Services Act. (Sponsored by Rep. Norbert of Portland; additional cosponsors.)

### *Wednesday, January 28*

**Criminal Justice & Public Safety**  
**Room 211, Cross State Office Building, 1:00 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1122**

LD 1803 – An Act Requiring Blood Testing of All Drivers Involved in Fatal Accidents. (Sponsored by Rep. Bowles of Sanford; additional cosponsors.)

LD 1821 – An Act To Increase the Amount of Restitution Allowed for State and Municipal Fire Service. (Sponsored by Rep. Duplessie of Westbrook; additional cosponsors.)

**Marine Resources**  
**Room 437, State House, 1:00 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1337**

LD 1680 – An Act To Establish Harbor Master Standards and Course Requirements. (Sponsored by Sen. Turner of Cumberland County; additional cosponsors.)

### *Thursday, January 29*

**Labor**  
**Room 220, Cross State Office Building, 1:30 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1333**

LD 1688 – An Act To Clarify the Law Regarding Interpreting Services for People Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing. (Sponsored by Sen. Edmonds of Cumberland; additional cosponsors.)

**Legal & Veterans Affairs**  
**Room 436, State House, 1:30 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-1310**

LD 1639 – An Act To Make Polling Places More Convenient. (Sponsored by Rep. Percy of Phippsburg; additional cosponsors.)

**Transportation**  
**Room 126, State House, 1:00 p.m.**  
**Tel: 287-4148**

LD 1676 – An Act To Allow Communications Towers on Land of the Maine Turnpike Authority. (Sponsored by Sen. Hatch of Somerset County.)

### **Business, Research & Economic Development**

LD 1815 – An Act To Establish the Maine Jobs, Trade and Democracy Act. (Emergency) (Sponsored by Rep. Colwell of Gardiner; additional cosponsors.)

This bill would create the Citizen Trade Policy Commission, a 17-member commission charged with assessing the legal and economic impact of international trade agreements on Maine and making recommendations to the Legislature, the congressional delegation and U.S. trade negotiations. One of the members of the commission would be a representative of the Maine Municipal Association.

### **Labor**

LD 1688 – An Act To Clarify the Law Regarding Interpreting Services for People Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing. (Sponsored by Sen. Edmonds of Cumberland; additional cosponsors.)

This bill would rewrite the law governing the requirement of state, county and local government to provide interpreting services for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and appearing before agencies associated with the governmental entity. Among the “clarifications” advanced by this bill, there is more detail provided with respect to the rights of the person who is deaf to identify the services that they need, and new language expressly apportioning the cost of providing the interpreting services to the state, county or local governmental entities before whom the deaf person is appearing.

### **Taxation**

LD 1763 – An Act To Promote Responsible Pet Ownership. (Sponsored by Rep. Colwell of Gardiner; additional cosponsors.)

This bill, based on New Hampshire law, would establish the

Companion Animal Sterilization Program to provide funding, through a voluntary check-off on the individual income tax form, to help Maine residents who adopt a cat or a dog from an animal shelter and need the animal to be spayed or neutered. This bill would also establish the Companion Animal Overpopulation Committee as a permanent committee whose purpose is to study pet population in Maine and the relationship of companion animal overpopulation to the spread of rabies and other threats to the public health and make recommendations to reduce the number of stray and homeless cats and dogs in the state and the number healthy cats and dogs euthanized in animal shelters and to increase compliance with dog licensing and rabies vaccination laws. The 14-member committee includes legislators, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife and representatives of veterinarians, humane societies, dog and cat breeders, the public, municipalities and municipal clerks.

### **Utilities & Energy**

LD 1819 – An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Study Group To Examine an Emergency Alert Notification System of Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Individuals. (Submitted by Sen. Treat of Kennebec County for the Study Group to Examine an Emergency Alert Notification System for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Individuals pursuant to Resolve 2003, c. 78.)

This bill would implement the recommendations of a special study group examining the emergency alert notification system for deaf individuals. Among those recommendations, the bill would establish as state policy the encouragement of a communications system that involves seamless, integrated, robust and redundant means of communication that enable rapid contact with first responders, ensure emergency alert notification to all affected persons in the State, including at-risk populations such as the hearing or visually impaired, and enhance homeland security.