



LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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Meet ME in the Middle *Protecting 1st Responders*

In a room usually filled with actuaries and suits, the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Affairs Committee entertained an afternoon of personal stories shared by residents clad in public safety attire, as it held a public hearing on LD 444, *An Act to Designate First Responders and Other Public Safety Professionals as a Special Risk Population for the Purposes of Improving Insurance Coverage for the Effects of Trauma*, sponsored by Sen. Donna Bailey of York County, who also co-chairs the committee.

As a concept draft bill carried over into the second session, the amended bill would treat the role of first responder as a risk factor and require health insurers to cover preventive screenings and practices that are well established to capture health issues in public safety employees long before normal age-related metrics do. The bill would also allow first responders to identify a preferred third-party screening provider or allow a primary care physician to order specific medical screenings.

Currently, the preventive screenings proven to detect medical issues in first responders are not covered by health insurance because allowable testing coverage uses age, not the position of risk, for an individual as the filter to deem the tests as “medically necessary.”

Additionally, many first responders are not on municipal insurance plans, or volunteer for a small community service that would otherwise not be able to provide fire or EMS services.

A significant number of peer reviewed studies from the International Journal of Emergency Medicine, International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, University of Buffalo, Mayo Heart Study, and the American Psychological Association, found that excessive exposure to undesirable events with negative outcomes have been associated with increased risk for suicide, as well as increased risk for the early onset of cardiac health deterioration.

The studies show that while the average age of a civilian patient who has a heart attack is 65, for public safety workers the average age is 49. Worse still, 7% of the civilian population under the age of 45 will experience a heart attack, while 45% of those in a public safety profession will experience their first heart attack before the same age.

The age specific cancer rates among firefighters are 323% higher than that of the general population between the ages of 35-39 and attributed to more than 66% of deaths in this profession.

Just like a public safety emergency, the health risks do not discriminate based on a responder’s employment or volunteer status before arriving.

It is for these reasons that the Legislature established that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a heart attack either suffered on duty or immediately following a traumatic call, and a set list of cancers that can be presumed to be the conditions for a work-related injury. Even though studies show that simple blood tests can detect inflammation markers that can stop further cardiovascular injury with treatment, and the contribution of vitamin deficiency to wellness, health insurance providers will not cover the tests necessary to detect an injury before it occurs, until a first responder is ill.

The committee heard testimony from first responders who shared personal stories of health issues that could have been prevented and the challenges of navigating a healthcare system awash with providers who do not understand public safety culture or risks. First responders spoke to how a heart attack experienced at 35 years of age could have been detected had

(continued on page 2)

Smoke ‘Em if You Got ‘Em

The Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee settled in for a long day of cannabis public hearings on Wednesday. Of municipal interest was LD 1952, *An Act to Allow On-site Cannabis Consumption*, sponsored by Rep. David Boyer of Poland. This bill would allow for the consumption of cannabis on-site at designated lounges or social clubs, much like cigar lounges – which yes, are legal in Maine – and intends to fill a gap in statute that is perceived to affect the tourism industry, specifically.

Right out of the gate, committee members were asking questions municipal officials have also been pondering. How does this play with Maine smoking laws? What kind of training would be provided to employees regarding overconsumption? What are the liability issues for these types of businesses, as well as the overarching public health, safety, and enforcement

(continued on page 4)

Meet ME in the Middle cont'd

the inflammation test been in use at the time. One first responder who, despite having a clean bill of health and an active lifestyle, was diagnosed as having a cardiac condition only after convincing a primary care physician to order the inflammation marker test and paying for it out of pocket.

The lack of coverage for therapy and testing is also linked to staff retention issues as significant cardiac events have forced several first responders into medical retirement. It is the retention of existing staff and volunteers that has become even more important to municipalities. Even when a first responder is seeking assistance for physical symptoms of PTSD, or requests connecting with a specialist, providers are not always tuned into the signs. Another first responder shared his experience with seeking help from his own primary care physician and commitment to making sure members of his staff do not encounter the same barriers.

Recognizing the link between the head and the heart and the need for a significant culture change, law enforcement leadership in many communities have established programs that enable clinicians with expertise in the trauma associated with provision of public safety services to offer psychoeducational information, including stress management. Additionally, these programs provide the opportunity for first responders to establish a trusted avenue for ongoing counseling while maintaining a first responder's privacy, which is a vital first step in stemming suicides among the community.

However, those services are not universally provided across emergency services or agencies and resources remain a significant barrier.

Committee members also heard from a proponent of LD 444 who shared the results of his study, recently published in the [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#)

(https://journals.lww.com/joem/abstract/9900/liposomal_associated_phospholipase_a2_is_more.476.aspx), which proved that mainstream age and sex-based screening tools failed to identify over 90% of cardiovascular events in first responders while the \$350 inflammatory biomarker test identified the health risk 90% of the time in individuals as young as 28 years of age.

Unsurprisingly, the opponents of the bill were the health insurance companies, one of which expressed that such screenings should be paid for by the property taxpayers, because the health risks were job related, and shouldn't be covered by the private insurance held by spouses or other employers. Others suggested that the property tax funded Workers' Compensation insurance program should pay for the screenings, rather than the premium payers enrolled in property tax funded health insurance programs.

Both arguments miss the point that prevention is the key to addressing work related injuries, which is the only way worker's compensation claims are triggered. First responders, their families, and communities are asking for a path to prevent injury. Only one of the insurance companies expressed a willingness to sit down and find a path for providing coverage, though expressed it may be elusive.

However, the insurance company that covers many police, fire and EMS employees in Massachusetts has been able to create an insurance code for non-age-related medical and other screening services first responders need. They also offer the screenings to others covered by the same insurance, such as teachers.

The refreshingly thoughtful and policy inquisitive committee members asked detailed questions and requested that the cost-based factors being raised be further illuminated before the work session to better understand why many of the blood tests could not be considered preventative and how such tests are considered "medically necessary." With the average on duty cardiac event costing one insurance group between \$300,000 and \$600,000, members questioned why prevention was not more appealing. The answer was it wasn't health insurance coverage paying for those claims.

Bill language matters, and while as drafted the exception will not impact all insurances that cover first responders, it is a step towards normalizing the provision of specialized mental and physical health services and helping educate providers to screen this group early in their careers. Officials are happy to find any path to prevention.

Healthy resilient first responders lead more productive lives, cause less disciplinary issues, and live longer following their years of service especially when coupled with appropriate early detection of cardiac risks that manifest differently in this population. Leaving that dependent on an agency or community's capacity to fund a prevention program on top of their insurance expenditures seems illogical.

Hopefully willing stakeholders can find a way to meet Maine's first responders and their communities in the middle.



POTHLES & POLITICS

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HEARING SCHEDULE

For the week of January 29, 2024

Note: What follows is a schedule of public hearings which were known to us at the time of this publication. To sign up for direct committee notifications of meetings, hearings and work sessions, you can choose which committees you would like to hear from at this link: <https://lists.legislature.maine.gov/sympa>. Also, you should check your newspapers for Legal Notices as there may be changes in the hearing schedule. Weekly schedules for hearings and work sessions can also be found on the Legislature's website at: <http://legislature.maine.gov/calendar/#Weekly/>.

MONDAY, JANUARY 29

Criminal Justice & Public Safety
Room 436, State House, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1122

LD 2094 – Resolve, to Require the Establishment of a Stakeholder Group to Examine and Improve the Recruitment, Retention and Wellness of Law Enforcement Officers

LD 2109 – An Act to Maintain State Police Rural Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels

Submitting testimony after Hearing:

Legislative committees are currently working through several concept draft bills that have already had public hearings but were carried over into the Second Regular Session to allow more time for bill sponsors to develop the language necessary to advance the initiative. Even after a public hearing, the public can submit written testimony and comments on proposed language to concept drafts. For directions on how to submit, see the January 5 edition of the Legislative Bulletin.

LD 2129 – An Act to Establish a Statewide Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Kit Tracking System and Conduct an Inventory of Existing Forensic Examination Kits in the Possession of Law Enforcement

Judiciary
Room 438, State House, 9:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1327

LD 2192 – Resolve, to Ensure That the Independent Commission to Investigate the Facts of the Tragedy in Lewiston Has Necessary Authority to Discharge Its Fact-finding Mission

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30

Joint Select Committee on Housing
Room 216, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-4149

LD 2158 – An Act to Improve the Housing Voucher System

State & Local Government
Room 214, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1330

LD 2146 – An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters

LD 2167 – An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans

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

LD 1750 – Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Complete a Service Plan and Determine the Scope of Work for Restoration of Rail Use of

the Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor from Downtown Portland to Auburn

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31

Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
Room 206, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1338

LD 2141 – An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State

Judiciary
Room 438, State House, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1327

LD 91 – An Act to Adopt the National 2022 Amendments to the Uniform Commercial Code

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1

Health & Human Services
Room 209, Cross Building, 3:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1317

LD 2157 – An Act to Prohibit Tobacco Sales near Schools

Marine Resources
Room 206, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1337

LD 2065 – An Act to Amend Maine's Aquaculture Leasing

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

LD 2056 – Resolve, Designating Route 127 in Arrowsic the Private Merwin A. Delano, Jr. Memorial Highway

LD 2116 – An Act to Require Flame-retardant Seats on New School Buses

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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concerns? Local control being of utmost importance.

The topic generated much discussion on what is happening in other states as well as the reality of what is happening here in Maine, such as the idea of “hop on hop off” bus tours or what is currently happening, which is known as “burn cruising.” Burn cruising is when you simply drive around and smoke cannabis because there is no legal place to consume and the bus tours are much like the hop on hop off tourist buses you see in larger cities, but provide a well-ventilated mode of transportation, with a sober driver, for cannabis users and stops at various cannabis businesses and other non-cannabis venues.

Although, burn cruising isn't anything new as it has been happening since the 1960s, albeit with much less potent cannabis.

Proponents for the bill included many cannabis business owners where a majority testified that droves of tourists have come to adult use establishments wanting to purchase products but are then stymied with no location to consume them. Supporters of the bill also claimed that the lack of social clubs is hindering tourism and economic advancement in this market.

Charles Stockstill testified that he is a cannabis sommelier certification holder from the Green Flower Institute (GFI) and is one of only three in Maine. He has been involved with many events that include on-site consumption, some with over 70,000 attendees, and has only encountered three incidents, which all had alcohol as an added factor. Stockstill recommended the two substances not come together in the same establishment, due to the increased risks involved. He also supports the party bus concept as it can generate revenue for non-cannabis related local businesses.

GFI was formed in 2021 through the combined efforts of Green Flower, a cannabis training and education company, and a group of industry representatives and business leaders representing all aspects of the market. Their primary goal is to develop and maintain standardized credentials that serve members of the cannabis industry as legalization continues and will generate value for job seekers, employers, and other cannabis professionals.

John Hudak, Office of Cannabis Policy (OCP) Director, testified in strong opposition to the bill due to substantial concerns with air quality, employee safety and training, liability, and enforcement. As a result, Hudak was peppered with questions from committee members for specific public health and safety concerns and asked for the department's thoughts on a variety of options that would allow social clubs to mitigate the tourism issue that seems to have evolved. OCP pointed out that there are smokeless options available, such as vapes and edibles, but the department must prioritize public health and safety.

OCP's testimony was punctuated by the Department of Highway Safety who shares public safety concerns with impaired driving. This testimony generated a robust discussion on traffic crash data, of which 25% of all crashes are due to impairment

and is a static number that doesn't ever change significantly.

Among others in opposition were the Maine Medical Association, MMA, Maine Public Health, and the American Cancer Society who all share the same enforcement concerns in addition to public health concerns related to secondhand smoke, employee safety, and server training to prevent overconsumption.

MMA specifically was asked to poll its members to gauge the temperature among local leaders regarding the issues the tourism industry is facing with a lack of consumption sites for adult use products purchased by tourists. It's clear that committee members want to support a growing industry that generates significant revenue for our state, however, municipalities who have opted in have yet to see any monetary benefit from the additions to state coffers and would be hard pressed to support the expansion of this industry with no incentive to do so.

Another cannabis bill heard by the committee was LD 2147, *An Act to Remove the Requirement for Edible Cannabis Products to Be Stamped or Embossed on Each Serving with a Universal Symbol*, also sponsored by Rep. Boyer. This bill would remove the requirement that each serving size of an edible be embossed with a universal symbol.

This bill was met with competing interests in public health, safety, business operations and the loss of revenue from products deemed as non-compliant by OCP staff. Accidental ingestion was also a point of discussion that led to differing viewpoints on whether the responsibility fell to the individual or the government to protect public health.

Two other cannabis bills with no municipal impact were heard by the committee, before it moved into a work session on the carryover bill, LD 1914, *An Act to Enact the Maine Psilocybin Health Access Act*, sponsored by Sen. Donna Bailey of York County. The bill had a public hearing on May 25, 2023, and the analyst reminded the committee that the initiative would create a regulatory framework for psilocybin use in a controlled, specific setting.

Committee members and participants were smoked after the seven-hour public hearing marathon and had little left in their bowls to put into working this measure but engaged in discussion with representatives from Oregon who shared their experience with psilocybin legislation like the one being proposed in LD 1914.

As of right now there is no fiscal impact from this bill but there is much confusion around the piece of the bill that mentions personal use since the intent of the bill is to use psilocybin as a treatment method in a controlled setting and not as an adult use product.

This bill was ultimately tabled but stay tuned to see if LD 1914 succeeds or if Maine will just stick with the magic of cannabis.

Taxing Work

It was a busy week for the Taxation Committee with not much relief in sight. With the deadline to vote out carry-over bills practically upon them, Tuesday's agenda was packed with one hearing and multiple work sessions for carry-over bills with municipal impact.

LD 1893, *An Act to Allow a Municipality to Impose a Fee on Short-Term Rentals for the Benefit of That Municipality*, sponsored by Rep. Tiffany Strout of Harrington, would provide that through a local referendum, communities could choose and impose a fee on short term rentals, with use of those funds also determined by the community. The sponsor brought forth an amendment that would change the bill completely, proposing that 2% of the 9% lodging tax that is currently collected, be disbursed directly to the municipality where the tax was collected.

Alternatively, a cosponsor of the bill proposed an amendment to remove campgrounds from the definition of short-term rental and to add a cap to the local fee. MMA testified in favor of the bill, as originally printed, citing increased needs for local revenue sources and the home rule authority given to municipal officials. Beyond the sponsors, MMA was the only proponent of the bill.

Overwhelming opposition was heard from the hospitality industry, both rental agencies and individuals who manage rental properties. The prevailing argument surrounded the notion that additional fees, that would be passed on to property renters, would discourage visits to our state. The opposition went further to imply that the lack of rental income to some individuals, resulting from additional fees, could prevent their continued ownership of coastal and vacation homes that have been part of their families for generations. One proponent even intimated that municipalities

are not in need of additional revenue, but instead need to manage their finances more effectively. In addition, significant time was spent discussing the definitions of the words "fee" and "tax."

Ultimately, representatives from Maine Revenue Services presented testimony, also in opposition, stating that the Administration has not historically supported local options, by way of fees or taxes. Despite some committee support for home rule authority and acknowledgment of the need for increased local revenue, it's doubtful this bill survives the work session, scheduled for Wednesday, January 31 at 10 a.m.

Following the public hearing, the committee held work sessions for five additional bills of municipal concern.

MMA's platform bill, LD 1685, *An Act to Increase Acreage Eligibility and Change Requirements for Filing Plans Under the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law*, was pulled by the sponsor, Rep. Ann Matlack of St. George, after continued discussions between stakeholders were unable to produce consensus on language. It is likely an updated version of this bill will resurface in 2025. Additionally, LD 2005, *An Act to Eliminate the Aircraft Excise Tax*, sponsored by Rep. Ann Fredericks of Sanford, was unanimously voted out "ought not to pass," resulting in a win for local excise tax retention.

Two bills were further tabled for additional discussion. LD 1153, *An Act to Allow Municipalities to Tax Personal Solar Energy Equipment Under 5 Megawatts*, sponsored by Rep. David Woodsome of Waterboro, would remove the property tax exemption erroneously applied to large scale solar installations. The sponsor indicated that the bill was never intended to remove the exemption from rooftop or residential solar and would offer

(continued on page 6)

IN THE HOPPER

The bill summaries are written by MMA staff and are not necessarily the bill's summary statement or an excerpt from that summary statement. During the course of the legislative session, many more bills of municipal interest will be printed than there is space in the Legislative Bulletin to describe. Our attempt is to provide a description of what would appear to be the bills of most significance to local government, but we would advise municipal officials to also review the comprehensive list of LDs of municipal interest that can be found on MMA's website, www.memun.org.

Criminal Justice & Public Safety

LD 2094 – *Resolve, to Require the Establishment of a Stakeholder Group to Examine and Improve the Recruitment, Retention and Wellness of Law Enforcement Officers* (Sponsored by President Jackson of Aroostook Cty.)

This bill requires the Department of Public Safety to convene a stakeholder group made up of members from various police organizations around the state, Department of Public Safety, Maine Criminal Justice Academy, private security firms and

a statewide organization representing mental health to study: (1) how to incentivize and encourage the recruitment of law enforcement officers and how funding could be provided to address vacant law enforcement positions; (2) how to incentivize and encourage the retention of law enforcement officers and how funding could be provided to support this goal; (3) how to incentivize and encourage mental and physical wellness programs for law enforcement officers and how funding could be provided to support this goal; (4) how to develop and support law enforcement entities in rural communities and how funding could be provided to support community peace and crime deterrence; (5) the current educational, social service, public health, criminal justice, drug enforcement and economic needs of communities and law enforcement entities, opportunities to address those needs and how funding could be provided to support the peacekeeping efforts of law enforcement entities; (6) the impact of media on public perception of law

Taxing Work cont'd

that clarification as an amendment. The committee hesitated to move the bill out of committee hoping to consider its impacts in conjunction with a separate solar taxation bill yet to be heard.

LD 1648, *An Act to Make Changes to the Farm and Open Space Tax Law*, sponsored by Rep. James Boyle of Gorham, as written, looks to update the current Open Space program to be structured more like the Tree Growth program, including reimbursement to municipalities to replace a portion of related property tax revenue losses. The bill also extends eligibility to parcels managed under a carbon conservation plan, which is an agreement between the landowner and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. A stakeholder group with representatives from conservation organizations and the forest products industry started meeting in September and requested more time to complete an amendment to the bill. It is likely that both tabled bills will be scheduled for final work sessions within the next week.

Finally, the committee reviewed additional information from Rep. Benjamin Hymes of Waldo, sponsor of LD 1737, *An Act to Provide up to \$5,000 in Property Tax Relief to Veterans*. The sponsor's amendment, originally discussed at a prior work session, changes the type of property tax relief from the originally proposed dollar value that would reduce taxes due, to an increase in the current valuation-based exemption, in a tiered format based on a veteran's disability rating. The bill would also remove the age minimum and periods of service criteria currently required for eligibility.

The removal of the age requirement alone would more than double the number of veterans, statewide, who would be eligible for the exemption and the calculations, based on Bureau of Veterans Services statistics and using the state's average property tax mil rate, would increase the state cost of reimbursement to municipalities by more than six times, should all eligible veterans enroll in the program. The committee voted the bill out as "ought to pass as amended," recognizing that the program hasn't been reviewed nearly enough since its adoption and wanting to acknowledge the sacrifices our veterans have made while serving this country. But the potentially hefty price tag on this bill may prompt its own sacrifice once on the appropriations table.

One last municipally relevant bill had its public hearing on Wednesday and received overwhelming support from stakeholders. Earlier this month, MMA's Legislative Policy Committee voted to support LD 2106, *An Act to Accelerate the Production of Affordable Housing and Strengthen the Historic Property Rehabilitation Tax Credit*, sponsored by Sen. Peggy Rotundo of Androscoggin County, for the tools it could provide communities in expanding housing options.

Additional taxation bills with local implications, representing a variety of initiatives, will be heard by the committee as the session moves forward. A sampling of bills yet to come include LD 2027, *An Act to Clarify the Property Tax Exemption for Air*

Pollution Control Facilities, sponsored by Sen. Cameron Reny of Lincoln County; LD 2048, *An Act to Amend the Content of Notices Provided with Respect to Tax Liens on Certain Property*, sponsored by Rep. Joseph Perry of Bangor; LD 2076, *An Act to Exempt from Excise Tax Vehicles of Active Duty Service Members Stationed Out-of-State*, sponsored by Rep. Michael Lemelin of Chelsea; LD 2102, *An Act to Support Municipalities by Repealing the Law Limiting the Municipal Property Tax Levy*, sponsored by Sen. Teresa Pierce of Cumberland County; LD 2111, *An Act Regarding the Timeline for Property Tax Abatement Based on Hardship or Poverty*, sponsored by Sen. Jeffrey Timberlake of Androscoggin County; and LD 2162, *An Act Regarding the Homestead Property Tax Exemption and the Property Value Reassessment Process*, sponsored by Rep. Daniel Ankeles of Brunswick.

Stay tuned for updates on these bills.

A Reprieve from Election Law Changes...For Now.

Election clerks can breathe a sigh of relief since the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee voted "ought not to pass" on LD 1959, *An Act Regarding Open Primary Elections and Ranked-choice Voting*, sponsored by Sen. Joe Baldacci of Penobscot County.

The work session opened with the analyst providing an overview of the bill and reminding the committee of the testimony received at the public hearing held in May 2023. During the analyst's research on this bill, it was found that similar bills have been introduced in past sessions, with one mimicking LD 1959 closely, and provided an overview of the considerations and technical issues found with previous legislation.

The analyst also noted that election law changes from the 2023 legislative session have not been assessed yet and cautioned the committee from making additional changes without knowing if newly enacted provisions have worked. Further, this bill would potentially create an undetermined fiscal note as the proposal creates additional costs for the Secretary of State's (SOS) Office in the form of new ballots, and education for clerks on the law changes, among other things.

Rep. Marc Malon of Biddeford commented that although there are some worthy merits to this measure, given the position of the SOS and considering the significant amount of work still needed for this bill and the amount of time left to complete that work, he moved LD 1959 ought not to pass. A majority of the committee agreed with the lone opposition coming from Rep. David Boyer of Poland.

Be on the lookout for this to come up on future House and Senate calendars.

Limiting Eminent Domain

The Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee conducted a public hearing on Tuesday for LD 2087, *An Act to Protect Property Owners by Preventing the Use of Eminent Domain to Build Transmission Lines Under the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program*, sponsored by Sen. Chip Curry of Waldo County. This proposal respects the intent to integrate Northern Maine into the transmission grid but aims to address the reality that some infrastructure projects affect communities disproportionately, and hit harder in areas that lack political power.

Proponents for the bill included landowners affected by the proposed LS Power transmission line, that is currently stalled, as well as residents who are not affected. The testimony provided generated many questions from committee members on how best to move forward with the hope that the delay to this project will allow time to bring interested parties together and develop a more transparent and fair eminent domain process.

Fair and just compensation for land taken by eminent domain is a major concern but more complicated when a landowner doesn't want to sell their land, and no amount of compensation would be fair and just. Determining fair and just compensation could be a focus for discussions going forward but must include the recognition that private lands are targeted for these projects because public lands require a two-thirds vote of the Legislature

to be taken by eminent domain, which is unlikely.

An example of one landowner affected by the LS Power transmission line is the testimony received that the presented plan would split their land, which happened to be right through the middle of their aviation runway that they use for a personal aircraft.

Opposition for the bill came from the Maine Renewable Energy Association who testified that siting and developing transmission infrastructure is needed to accomplish the State's energy goals but is happy to be part of the stakeholder group for future projects. Committee members acknowledged that if Maine is going to electrify the state, a dozen transmission lines won't be enough, yet both sides agree that getting the process correct now will better set Maine up for success in the future.

MMA was among several who testified "neither for nor against" LD 2087 and those participating as a whole delivered the collective message that transparency in the process, review of eminent domain laws, and the creation of a stakeholder group to determine a path forward are paramount to avoid future issues as Maine works towards its energy goals.

A work session has yet to be scheduled. Watch the legislative calendar and future bulletins for updates.

HOPPER (cont'd)

enforcement officers; and (7) current community policing, social services and crime prevention programs throughout the State, and recommendations for future programs, and how funding could be provided to support the peacekeeping efforts of law enforcement entities. No later than January 2, 2025, the department is further directed to report out recommendations to the Judiciary Committee.

LD 2109 – *An Act to Maintain State Police Rural Patrol Services at 2020 Staffing Levels (Emergency)* (Sponsored by Sen. Timberlake of Androscoggin Cty.)

The bill directs the Department of Public Safety, Bureau of State Police to maintain rural patrol services in all counties of the State at no less than 2020 staffing levels.

LD 2129 – *An Act to Establish a Statewide Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Kit Tracking System and Conduct an Inventory of Existing Forensic Examination Kits in the Possession of Law Enforcement (Emergency)* (Sponsored by Rep. Geiger of Rockland)

Of municipal interest, this emergency bill requires a law enforcement agency that receives, maintains, stores or preserves sexual assault forensic examination kits to complete an inventory of all kits in its possession and report its findings to the Department of Public Safety. The department must

compile all agency reports and present findings of the inventory by September 1, 2025 to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over criminal justice and public safety matters and at the same time post the report on the department's public website in an easily accessible location. Public Law 2023, chapter 236 changed a provision in the Maine Revised Statutes, to require law enforcement agencies to store sexual assault forensic examination kits for 20 years. For consistency with that provision, this bill amends a provision in Title 24 to require law enforcement agencies to store sexual assault forensic examination kits for 20 years.

Health & Human Services

LD 2157 – *An Act to Prohibit Tobacco Sales near Schools* (Sponsored by Rep. Moonen of Portland)

The bill would prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from issuing or renewing a retail tobacco license to a retailer within 1,000 feet of a school.

Joint Select Committee on Housing

LD 2158 – *An Act to Improve the Housing Voucher System* (Sponsored by Rep. Golek of Harpswell)

Among establishing new reporting and data collection



HOPPER (cont'd)

requirements for the Maine State Housing Authority, of municipal interest this bill; (1) defines the term “housing voucher;” (2) permits a municipality to contract with landlords of residential housing at the highest rental rates allowed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development program; (3) allows municipalities to establish a reasonable time limit on the use of housing vouchers once issued and; (4) permits the use of a housing voucher in any municipality in the state once issued by either a state or municipal housing authority.

State & Local Government

LD 2146 – *An Act to Prohibit Certain Municipalities from Adopting Moratoria on Emergency Shelters* (Sponsored by Rep. Lookner of Portland)

The bill prohibits municipalities with populations exceeding 30,000 people from adopting moratoria on the establishment of emergency shelters that provide temporary shelter for persons experiencing homelessness.

LD2167 – *An Act to Develop Maine’s Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans*

(Governor’s Bill)(Sponsored by Rep. Dhalac of South Portland)

This bill establishes the Office of New Americans (ONA), within the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, to improve the economic and civic integration of immigrants into Maine’s workforce and communities by identifying and addressing needs, barriers and opportunities by: collecting and analyzing relevant data; coordinating with all relevant local, state and federal government agencies; serving as the State’s primary liaison with all stakeholders; and undertaking and promoting the activities that help achieve the goals of the ONA. Additionally, the office is responsible for strengthening workforce opportunities by providing guidance and improving pathways for professional accreditation and licensure; expanding and improving access to English language learning programs; supporting the expansion of access to legal services; and partnering with and supporting municipalities, schools and community-based organizations and businesses providing assistance or opportunities to immigrants. The bill also creates a 19-member council to advise the ONA, including a municipal official appointed by the Speaker of the House.