

2021

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



LOOKING AT 2021

The Maine Municipal Association (MMA) is pleased to present its 2021 edition of the “MMA Year in Review.”

This report covers the programs and services MMA provided its members during the past year. MMA focused on several emerging areas and member needs, not the least of which was the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic continues to put municipal officials on the front lines of protecting their citizens and delivering necessary municipal services with new approaches and requirements.

Despite the pandemic, MMA successfully advanced the 2021-2022 legislative platform; worked closely with our federal delegation to ensure funding to municipalities for pandemic relief; worked with our members to ensure access to the federal funding; continued to promote municipal careers through our digital ad campaign; contracted with BerryDunn of Portland to complete an exhaustive review and gap analysis of municipal training needs; continued to collect data with the new web-based municipal fiscal survey; delivered timely training topics; and, administered member focused coverages and services through the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust and MMA’s Risk Management Services programs. This report also outlines the many ways MMA continues to focus on COVID-19 related advocacy, guidance and training to our members as well as making headway on our 2021 priority areas.

We hope this “MMA Year in Review” is informative and demonstrates the value of our services and programs. Please contact MMA if you would like additional information or if you have any questions. We also invite you to visit MMA’s website (www.memun.org) to learn more about the Association and review helpful guidance on city and town issues, including up-to-date information on COVID-19.

On behalf of MMA’s leadership and staff, thank you for your membership support of the Maine Municipal Association – a member and mission driven organization. It is a privilege to serve local elected and appointed municipal officials during these challenging times.

MMA applauds municipal officials’ remarkable work over the past year and offers our best wishes and hopes for a better 2022.

Respectfully,

Catherine M. Conlow
Executive Director



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ADVOCACY SERVICES

MMA's State & Federal Relations (SFR) Department provides advocacy services focused on ensuring that the municipal perspective is considered when state laws are enacted, and state agency regulations are adopted. MMA's 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC), which is made up of two municipal officials elected by the select boards and councils in each of the state's 35 Senate Districts, guides the Association's advocacy efforts.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **Amended the way in which advocacy services were provided to adapt to the remote legislative session.** The changes included increased use of action alerts to inform members of the issues being debated by the House and Senate; Zoom LPC and subcommittee meetings to establish positions on bills of municipal interest; and monthly legislative updates at affiliate group meetings.
- **Successfully advanced MMA's 2021-2022 legislative platform.** As a result of the departments and member's "at home" advocacy efforts, the Legislature enacted a supplemental budget that increases revenue sharing to 5% over the next two years; funds 55% of the cost of K-12 public education; and beginning with the April 1, 2022 property tax year, increases reimbursement under the Homestead Exemption program by 3% annually.
- Worked with legislators and interested parties on remote meeting legislation, which was enacted by a two-thirds majority vote of both the House and Senate. Also collaborated with interested parties to help enact a producer stewardship program targeted at reducing the costs of managing solid waste at the local level.
- Defeated legislation seeking to significantly limit or repeal qualified immunity for law enforcement officials, as well as an attempt to make controversies over public employee salaries, benefits and pensions binding through arbitration.
- Worked with the Legal Services, Communication and Executive Departments to ensure municipal officials had up-to-date information on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) by reviewing and summarizing related regulations; participating in and hosting webinars; designing educational materials; responding to member questions; facilitating the county/municipal collaboration group; and conducting a member ARPA investment priorities and trusted partners survey.
- Collaborated with the Maine Chiefs of Police to conduct virtual town hall meetings with community members for the purpose of discussing the pressures placed on local law enforcement agencies and what residents believe is working in their local police departments, what practices they would like to see changed and the priorities they would like to have addressed.
- Staffed and participated in several legislative studies seeking to address the public maintenance of discontinued roads; increase access to affordable, senior and workforce housing; consider the placement of solar arrays on farmland parcels enrolled in current use programs; develop a statewide offshore wind roadmap; and identify challenges associated with local-level issuance of concealed weapons permits.
- Reworked the 2021 edition of the Federal Issues Paper to

focus on member experiences with the pandemic and needed federal support.

- Continued to participate in regular meetings with staff from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation to discuss issues of municipal interest and concern.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) SERVICES

MMA's Information Technology (IT) department manages a vast array of services necessary for the successful operation of an IT environment within the organization. Fundamental needs include infrastructure, applications, security, remote access, and training. MMA recognizes the increasing need for IT support and education within the municipal community. This is driven in part by continued threats that jeopardize the safety and security of city and town information resources.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **Cyber Liability Requirements.** MMA's IT staff assisted members in meeting requirements for cyber liability coverage through the MMA Property & Casualty Pool as well as infrastructure or network assessments performed by MMA's partner vendor at a reduced market rate.
- **Policy Development.** MMA assisted members in developing or updating Computer Use Policies, Privacy Policies, Vendor Confidentiality Agreements and other required or necessary documentation.
- **Internal Applications.** MMA successfully upgraded several applications, including its Document Management Application and Membership Database Application, as well as provided project management as well as technical assistance for existing application changes. MMA also shifted additional infrastructure to the cloud to ensure high availability to aid in disaster recovery.
- **On Site Training.** MMA offers on-site group training programs for municipal employees to strengthen computer security awareness. Programs are tailored to each community's needs.

COMMUNICATION & EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

The Communication & Educational Services (C&ES) staff has an array of responsibilities critical to MMA's mission of supporting our members. The Department is responsible for developing and maintaining effective communications with MMA members, promoting MMA policy priorities, and helping the public better understand the importance and value of municipal government. The Department oversees municipal training and professional development efforts, including workshops, webinars, and conferences, plus the annual MMA convention. C&ES also works closely with professional affiliate groups comprised of municipal employees to administer their memberships, trainings, certification programs and much more.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **A mix of virtual and live trainings** were held throughout 2021. Due to the continued health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have carefully evaluated the ability to hold safe in-person events over the past year. While face-to-face training is preferable in many ways, we continue to find value in the online webinars. Training participation has increased sig-

nificantly over the past year due to the convenience of virtual training. Our largest annual events - Municipal Technology & New Energy Conference, the Municipal Human Resources & Management Conference and the 85th Annual MMA Convention – were all held virtually this year. We look forward to resuming in-person trainings in early spring 2022.

- As our virtual offerings become more prolific, we continue to build our online **Video Training Library**. Members now have access to over 65 training videos on our website, some paid and some free, with topics ranging from Legal Marijuana and the ARPA to pressing HR and diversity issues.
- **Affiliate Group Services**. We proudly served 16 municipal affiliate groups in 2021, providing an array of administrative and professional development services to their members.
- **The Maine Town & City magazine** keeps members informed about municipal and legislative developments, and breaking news from around the State. It also features the always popular “People” and “Legal Notes” sections, as well as our numerous advertisers and business supporters.
- **Workforce Development**. We re-launched our HoMEtown Careers digital marketing campaign this spring and fall, which included new feature videos on careers in law enforcement and wastewater treatment.
- A **Curriculum Inventory & Assessment study** was conducted throughout 2021 to assess training opportunities, requirements, needs and gaps for all municipal officials and professions throughout the state. The final recommendations from our consultants, Berry Dunn, will be implemented beginning in 2022, starting with a restructuring of the C&ES Department. A **new Director of Educational Services** will focus on advancing municipal curriculum and training resources and opportunities for our members, while the newly created **Public Information Officer** position will spearhead a robust communication strategy and social media presence for the association.

LEGAL SERVICES

MMA’s Legal Services program provides legal opinions to municipal officials, produces manuals, information packets and other guidance, participates in the development and delivery of training programs, and advocates for municipal interests through “friend of the court” briefs.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **Legal Inquiry Service**. Our six attorneys responded to over 6,000 inquiries from municipal members during 2021. Inquiries focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on municipal operations and use of American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds. We also advised on a wide variety of municipal legal issues, including regulation of marijuana, tax liens, poverty abatements, citizen petitions, elections, land use and the Freedom of Access Act.
- **Legal Guidance Materials**. Legal Services guidance helped members navigate employment, budget, town meeting and other issues arising during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also maintain 13 manuals and over 60 information packets providing detailed guidance on a variety of municipal legal issues. In 2021, we published new editions of our Moderators, Municipal

Clerks, and Municipal Cooperation manuals, guidance on the American Rescue Plan Act, and numerous updates to our legal information packets.

- **Legal Training**. Our staff participated in MMA and Affiliate Group training programs, mostly via Zoom, including workshops on Town Meetings & Elections, Law for Tax Collectors, Law for Treasurers, Managing FOAA Requests, Marijuana Update, ABCs of Assessing for Non-Assessors and several workshops for Planning Boards/Boards of Appeals and Elected Officials.
- **Advocacy**. Legal Services filed an amicus curiae brief in late 2020, advocating for the City of Old Town in a property tax abatement appeal. During the 2021, the Maine Law Court decided the appeal in the City’s favor.
- **Legislative Support**. Legal Services staff is a resource to MMA’s State & Federal Relations staff on municipal legal issues presented by pending legislation. During the 2021 legislative session, the Legal Services staff provided significant input on proposed legislation dealing with a variety of municipal topics.

PERSONNEL SERVICES & LABOR RELATIONS

The Personnel Services & Labor Relations department staff has two distinct functional areas: providing human resource management for the MMA organization; and providing personnel management and labor relations advice, training and consulting services to MMA’s municipal and associate members.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **Labor Relations**. MMA Personnel Services & Labor Relations represented seven municipalities as they negotiated with 14 different collective bargaining units. Collective Bargaining was highly impacted by the COVID meeting restrictions and the related fiscal uncertainty. After 2020 when many contracts were negotiated as one-year agreements just to get through the pandemic, contracts have trended back in the direction of multi-year agreements.
- **Executive Searches**. MMA assisted seven municipalities in searches for new town or city managers. This service provides beginning-to-end assistance to the selectmen or council as they seek a new or replacement municipal manager. MMA maintains a list on our website of individuals available to be considered for interim town manager positions when the current manager resigns or retires.
- **General Personnel Management Assistance**. Staff responded to many inquiries from members regarding workplace issues arising from COVID-19 and all the related impacts on employment issues. Staff provided on-site entry level testing for a number of police and fire departments as they recruited new police officers or firefighters. Staff responded to several hundred general personnel inquiries from our members on issues as diverse as FMLA and the federal health care reform laws. Staff participated in training programs to assist our members in having proper HR practices.
- **Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERS)**. MMA has been actively involved as a member of the PLD (Participating Local Districts) Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee continues to monitor system performance to continue

their responsibility to protect the health of the PLD retirement plan, as well as participating in the creation of a disability insurance product that is available to PLDs.

- **MMA Personnel Management.** We were faced, like all our members, with relocating a sizable percentage of the workforce to remote work due to COVID. In 2021, most MMA employees return to the office, in a full time or hybrid work from the office and work from home combination. HR participated in all of that, as well as handling all the COVID leaves and related issues, conducted remote hiring processes and continued handling day-to-day internal HR issues. MMA had several retirements and vacancies during this year and HR has been working with MMA departments to find new employees to continue MMA's work for our members.

MAINE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH TRUST

The Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust (MMEHT or the Trust) provides cost-effective, quality employee benefit plans at competitive rates on a self-insured basis to local government and eligible quasi-governmental employees, retirees, and their dependents. The Trust, administered by MMA, allows participating employers to aggregate their purchasing power and take advantage of self-insurance, an efficient financial tool.

MMEHT provides health insurance benefits to nearly 20,000 participants in its medical plans, which are offered by more than 450 municipalities, counties, and special districts. The Trust also offers dental, life, vision, and short term and long-term disability plans.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- **Meeting Employers' Needs.** Three new employers joined the Health Trust in 2021. In addition, 20 employers changed or added health plans, and 23 employers added new benefits.
- **Implementation of a New Administration System.** In 2021 the Trust replaced an outdated legacy system with a modern, web-based platform for administration of billing and enrollment and tracking of member service calls. This new system will permit the Trust to provide employers with more functionality and information, and even better member service in the future.
- **Improving Health.** Many employees and dependents took advantage of the Health Trust's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Anthem in 2021, as well as the expanded Telephonic Diabetes Education and Support (TDES) program. In addition, employers and employees were able to participate in a variety of programs through Wellness Works, the Health Trust's health education and promotion program. In 2021, Wellness Works staff further expanded their reach to members from groups of all sizes, by developing several timely new online classes and on-demand webinars.
- **Providing Value.** Health Trust Member Services and Billing and Enrollment representatives answered thousands of telephone calls and emails from employers, employees, retirees, and their families. Member Services staff acted as a liaison between Health Trust members and the Trust's third-party administrators (Anthem, Delta Dental, and Unum), and aided in the

resolution of claims questions. Even though Health Trust Field Services staff were unable to maintain their normal schedules on the road due to the pandemic, they continued outreach by phone and email, to ensure that employers' and employees' needs were being met. Health Trust staff held online Annual Reporting Meetings, to provide Trust participants with updates on the Trust's financial condition and upcoming benefit changes; and worked with employers and their auditors to provide reporting required under GASB 75, and to administer the COBRA subsidies provided under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

- **Lowering Costs and Improving Quality.** The Health Trust continued to provide high quality benefits and superior service coupled with low administrative costs in 2021, which permitted the Trustees to provide Health Trust health plan members with lower rate adjustments than are being seen in the general health insurance market.

RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

MMA's Risk Management Services (RMS) administers three major group, self-funded programs for MMA's municipal and associate members. RMS provides specialized Underwriting, Loss Control and Claims Management unique to municipal government and special districts.

Workers' Compensation Fund. The Fund serves 569 members. The Fund proudly covers more than 41,000 employees throughout the State of Maine.

Property & Casualty Pool. The Pool specializes in municipal exposures and provides coverage to municipalities and special districts throughout the state of Maine.

Unemployment Compensation Fund. The Fund was created to assist members with meeting their obligations under the Employment Security Act. The UC Fund has 245 members and provides services to over 8,000 employees.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Rolled out the **Property & Casualty Pool Risk Reduction grant.** This program is designed to assist members in the reduction of property and liability exposures.
- RMS offered a new **Law Enforcement grant.** This grant was available to encourage and support Property & Casualty Pool members in achieving the Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation (MLEAP).
- RMS sponsored **stress management training** specific to law enforcement, firefighters, and EMS. This course provided guidance on a wide range of crisis intervention services to support the health and wellness of those employees in public safety.
- **Dividends.** RMS distributed over \$1.3 million to eligible members of the Property & Casualty Pool and Workers' Compensation Fund.
- RMS awarded **278 Safety Grants** for a total of \$326,240 through the Ed MacDonald Safety Grants and Scholarship Program in an effort to reduce the frequency and severity of workers' compensation claims.