



# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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## Blue Ribbon EMS 2.0

The Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in the State had a truncated second round review to further explore issues including key pressures impacting every level of public safety across the state. These include issues around workforce development, training, staff compensation and retention, and the unequal investment stakes between the levels of government charged with addressing the crisis.

Public safety professionals in every sector are responding to complex emergencies that have drastically changed over the past decades, placing an ever-increasing burden on training, and the level of education and expertise required to fill the roles often held by service-minded residents in their spare time. It was these stalwart local volunteers that allowed many small communities to have a part-time fire or rescue service. The lack of affordable housing for the average resident—let alone fulltime public servants—means Mainers are commuting farther away from their communities to make ends meet or working multiple jobs, leaving little time for community service.

How will the state with the oldest average residential population in the country meet the growing demand for EMS services and guarantee a knowledgeable, highly skilled response to the calls from Madawaska to Monhegan? This is the exact same question their police, fire, dispatch, and corrections colleagues are wrestling with from Eagle Lake to Elliot.

Last year, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommended gap funding to services in danger of collapsing. While the Legislature approved funding for stabilization and sustainability grants, the programs did not go into effect until October 23, 2023—the date of the first meeting for Blue Ribbon 2.0. With no money yet disbursed, this year the commission is recommending emergency legislation that strips the rulemaking requirement and immediately provides the overdue support to largely rural service providers.

Funding and issues with rulemaking were also key recommendations to protecting community informed self-determination of service levels. Public Law 2021, chapter 700 created a grant program that would allow a community to receive funding to examine the provision of EMS service with support from knowledgeable outside professionals led by the residents who ultimately must financially support the level of service they desire.

Again, the lack of a functioning EMS board and slow rulemaking process stalled those disbursements, and the program has not been implemented to date.

Barriers to regionalizing service provision include costs both for startup and capital at a rate so significant

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## The Gift of General Assistance

The Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services met for a final interim meeting on Thursday to discuss the many bills carried over addressing the General Assistance program. Two bills from MMA's Legislative Policy Committee are in the mix. LD 1664, *An Act to Increase Reimbursement Under the General Assistance Program*, sponsored by Sen. Marianne Moore of Washington County, would increase state reimbursement to municipalities from 70% to 90% and has been carried over on the appropriations table. LD 1732, *An Act to Expand the General Assistance Program*, sponsored by Rep. Michele Meyer of Eliot, would also increase the reimbursement and add enhanced funding, training, increased department support and a statewide database to the program.

Several municipal officials were on hand via zoom to describe their General Assistance experience, many of them also members of the Maine Welfare Directors Association, and to state their support for the changes proposed by LD 1732. The new director for the Office

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communities are unable to convince taxpayers of the potential long term cost savings that may be realized. Here the Blue Ribbon 2.0 members recommended that Maine EMS conduct a funding needs analysis for assisting in developing a regional approach and provide the Legislature and communities with vital information that may lead to greater support.

Other recommendations include prompts to the Legislature to enact pending bills like LD 1751, *An Act to Maximize Federal Funding in Support of Emergency Medical Services*, sponsored by Commission Chair, Sen. Chip Curry of Waldo County, which would maximize federal funding support for neonatal transport, no-transport calls and community paramedicine. The bill would increase funding for non-municipal services under the MaineCare program. Commission members also would like to see additional legislation to provide the same benefits for municipal ambulance services through an intergovernmental transfer program which would also increase the federal matching funds.

LD 1832, *An Act to Require Reimbursement of Fees for Treatment Rendered by Public and Private Ambulance Services*, sponsored by Commission member, Rep. Scott Cyrway of Albion, would allow both private and public ambulance providers to receive insurance reimbursement for community paramedicine services in state regulated health plans. The bill would have to be amended to apply to MaineCare, Medicare or other self-insurance companies as well.

Training and retention challenges, compassion fatigue, and constant demands impacting quality of life for public safety employees have limited local solutions. Hiring incentives and promises of lower call volumes often lead agencies to solutions that effectively rearrange the public safety “Titanic deck chairs” through interagency poaching from a dwindling pool of skilled employees. With the lack of a statewide focus on public safety recruitment efforts, such as that offered for teachers and nurses, and scant or non-existent support for the long underfunded heavily volunteer subsidized state training systems, LD 1409, *An Act to Require Reimbursement When a Municipality Hires First Responders Whose Training Costs Were Incurred by Another Municipality*, sponsored by Rep. Jessica Faye of Raymond was carried over. The bill would create a graduated interagency reimbursement mechanism to address the training costs incurred by one agency when an employee leaves for another agency.

Unlike the graduated “buy back” process for the ba-

sic law enforcement certification program through the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, certification for fire, EMS and dispatch have a mixture of free or subsidized training, privately acquired, and service funded elements at play. What seems like common sense public policy, is more complicated to place in an Excel spreadsheet. In the meantime, many services face a “Sophie’s Choice” between investing small pots of training funds in professional development for valued employees and having enough entry level trained employees to fill shifts.

There were no commission recommendations on other bills that would keep EMS and all public safety staff healthy and resilient as they wait for system change. LD 1857, *Resolve, to Establish a Public Safety Health and Wellness Grant Pilot Program*, sponsored by Rep. Lynn Copeland of Saco, is another solution awaiting legislative love on the Appropriations Table. 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, will be debated in the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services committee next session at the same time the Legislature returns to read the Blue Ribbon Commission’s report in full.

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### *The Gift of General Assistance..cont'd*

of Family Independence described potential new training opportunities for administrators and plans for an online statewide database. The obvious desire for collaboration between the department and municipalities was welcome news.

Committee members shared concerns that service center communities continue to bear the brunt of the General Assistance program, while at the same time wishing for clients to utilize services within their own communities. MMA advocacy staff acknowledged the burdens on both service center communities and the smaller municipalities, stressing that General Assistance is a program implemented by all communities and those smaller local needs must also be considered.

While decisions were not made for going forth into the next session, it is not unrealistic to think this interim work will result in a final bill with additional support for municipal officials. Like grandma always said, gifts aren’t only meant for the holidays.

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## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 18, 2023

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Note: 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 be found on the Legislature's website at: <http://legislature.maine.gov/calendar/#Weekly/>.

### TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19

**Abandoned and Discontinued Roads Commission  
State & Local Government Room 214, Cross Building,  
1:00 p.m.  
Tel: 287-1330**

The draft legislation subject to this public hearing before the Abandoned and Discontinued Roads Commission, the links to either watch or participate, as well as the Commission's Draft Report can be found here: <https://www.maine.gov/adrc/>

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## Community Resilience Partnership - New Grant Opportunities

The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) announced the opening of three grant opportunities for municipal and tribal governments and the unorganized territories through the Community Resilience Partnership (CRP).

New Community Action Grant funding is available for communities that are enrolled in the CRP and have *not* already received grant funding. Service Provider Grant funding is available for organizations that will assist communities with the process of becoming members of the CRP. In addition, GOPIF is expected to approve 10 awards of up to \$100,000 each, through Energy Efficiency Priorities Grants. This funding is only available to eligible communities that are enrolled in the CRP and have a census tract designated as "disadvantaged" by the U.S. EPA.

Visit the CRP website for more information and to sign up for informational webinars scheduled for December 20 at [www.maine.gov/future/climate/community-resilience-partnership](http://www.maine.gov/future/climate/community-resilience-partnership).



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## LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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