



LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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Budget Adoption & Adjournment

On Thursday, the Legislature spent the better part of the day and evening debating the merits of LD 609, *An Act Making Certain Appropriations and Allocations and Changing Certain Provisions of Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government*. As sponsored by Rep. Gattine (Westbrook) and amended by a majority of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, the bill makes supplemental General Fund appropriations for the last six months of FY 2025, and funds baseline General Fund expenditures for the FY 2026 – FY 2027 biennium. In a nutshell, the bill appropriates the funds necessary for the state to continue providing basic services and programs through June 30, 2027.

Of municipal importance, the amended initiative funds 55% of K-12 education, distributes 5% of state sales and income tax revenue to municipalities under the revenue sharing program, and reimburses towns and cities for 76% of the lost property tax revenue associated with the homestead exemption.

While the task of adopting the budget is routine, the path to enactment is not always straightforward or amicable.

For LD 609 to become effective law by June 30, 2025, the bill needed to be adopted with an emergency preamble, which requires a two-thirds vote of the House and Senate, or enacted by a majority of Maine lawmakers and the sine die adjournment of the Legislature. The process of adjourning “without day” starts the 90-day clock, allowing the adopted budget to become effective law before July 1.

Due to differing priorities, and after enacting the budget along party lines, early Friday morning state lawmakers adjourned the First Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature, however not before adopting an order requiring all issues not otherwise acted upon to be carried over into the next special or regular session. Additionally, the adjournment order provides that all hearings, work sessions and confirmation hearings scheduled prior to adjournment will be conducted as scheduled.

Based on the budget debate, it is unclear as to when the legislature will reconvene. It could be next week, next month or even next year. To that end, a member of the House sought to make the return-to-work date clear by amending the adjournment paperwork to establish the reconvention date as January 6, 2026; the date the legislature is statutorily required to return for the second session.

That motion failed adoption.

There is much left to be done. Hundreds of bills are already in committees waiting to receive public hearings and work sessions, and roughly 900 initiatives have yet to be printed. Key among the bills in limbo, is the vehicle, LD 210, necessary to enact additional funding for above baseline budget initiatives.

Municipal officials are tremendously grateful for the ongoing commitment to Maine property taxpayers, via the adoption of LD 609. However, the partisanship at the state level is disheartening. Municipal leaders are hopeful that legislators will take time to heal during the period of adjournment, however long that may be, and when they are next convened will return to Augusta ready to build the relationships necessary to finish the people’s business.

There’s No Exemption Like the Homestead Exemption...

Like no exemption I know.

It’s unlikely that in 1946 Irving Berlin could have predicted that municipal officials of the future would adapt his hit Broadway tune into a melody about tax policy. And yet, here we are.

The Taxation Committee held joint hearings on Wednesday for six property tax relief bills with five of those specifically addressing the Maine Resident Homestead Exemption Program. While each offered potential tools for the committee to consider, the bills fell into two distinct categories; support for all or support for a select few.

Everything about it is appealing.

The homestead exemption program currently offers a \$25,000 reduction in assessed value on the primary residences owned by eligible Maine residents. The lost tax revenue resulting from the exemption is reimbursed to municipalities at a rate of 76%. The value of the property tax relief varies by community and is impacted by a municipality’s mil rate and certified ratio.

In 2023, nearly 321,400 homeowners received the homestead exemption, resulting in a statewide \$7.4 billion reduction in taxable assessed value and delivering \$121 million in property tax relief, of which \$92 million was reimbursed by the state.

Get that happy feeling.

Two of the bills before the committee would increase the value of the exemption while maintaining the 76% state reimbursement to municipalities for the lost tax revenue. LD 140, *An Act to Incrementally Increase the Homestead Property Tax Exemption*, sponsored by Sen. Baldacci (Penobscot County) would increase the exemption’s value by \$10,000 each year over the next seven years and max out in 2032 at \$95,000. In addition, that final value would be adjusted, annually, based on inflation.

A second bill, LD 658, *An Act to Lower Property Taxes by Increasing the Homestead Property Tax Exemption*, sponsored by Rep. Faulkingham (Winter Harbor) would also increase the value of the

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There's No Exemption Like the Homestead Exemption.....cont'd

exemption, but to \$50,000 starting with the April 1, 2025 property tax year.

These two bills would extend property tax relief to all eligible taxpayers, thereby providing the most equitable relief to the community's entire tax base.

But still, you wouldn't change it for a sack of gold.

Three additional bills looked to amend the homestead exemption to help targeted taxpayers, namely residents 65 years of age or older, and veterans.

LD 7, *An Act to Increase the Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Residents 65 Years of Age and Older*, sponsored by Sen. Bennett (Oxford County) proposed to provide an increased exemption of \$75,000 to eligible residents. In addition to the age requirement, residents would need to have lived in the homestead for at least 10 years, verification of which could create an administrative burden for municipal staff.

Likewise, LD 570, *An Act to Provide an Additional Maine Resident Homestead Property Tax Exemption Based on Income*, sponsored by Sen. Reny (Lincoln County) would not only add an additional verification criterion, but would require assessors to review an applicant's federal adjusted gross income. If eligible, based on income parameters outlined in the bill, residents would qualify for an additional \$75,000 exemption.

Finally, LD 934, *An Act to Provide 100 Percent of the Maine Resident Homestead Property Tax Exemption Amount to Seniors and Veterans*, sponsored by Rep. Wood (Greene), would provide eligible residents 65 years of age or older or veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces with the full value of the \$25,000 exemption, regardless of a community's certified ratio.

Not only would these three bills provide targeted relief only to specific groups of taxpayers, all three present potential constitutional concerns, including a possible violation of the provision of equal apportionment and assessment of taxes under Article IX, Section 8 of the Maine Constitution and perhaps a trigger of the state mandate reimbursement requirement under Article IX, Section 21.

Where could you get money that you don't give back?

The last bill to receive a public hearing would essentially reinstate the recently repealed Property Tax Stabilization Program.

LD 559, *An Act to Provide Property Tax Stabilization for Older Maine Residents*, sponsored by Sen. Bailey (York County) would enable municipalities to adopt ordinances allowing eligible taxpayers to stabilize their property tax obligation, provided an application for stabilization was received by December 1, annually. The bill requires homeownership in Maine for a minimum of 10 years but without means testing. Additionally, the bill does not provide any state reimbursement for the lost tax revenue due to stabilization. Instead, LD 559 includes language allowing a municipality to adopt a local option sales tax to offset the lost property tax revenue.

You may be stranded out in the cold.

Testimony was provided by Maine Revenue Services (MRS) in opposition to all six bills. In addition to the obvious budget concerns and the proposals' projected impacts on state coffers, MRS also pointed to potential constitutional concerns. Of most interest, though, was that despite the obvious desire to reduce taxes by increasing the homestead exemption, it is the administration's view that

the best approach to reducing property taxes is the utilization of the Property Tax Fairness Credit (PTFC) program.

MRS argued that the PTFC is a more advantageous program for taxpayers. The program's tax relief is more targeted at those needing assistance, is based on an assessment of income, and is available to renters as well as to homeowners. It should be noted that the credit program also comes at a much lower cost to the state.

Next day on your dressing room they've hung a star.

While many proposals have been offered, with many more yet to come, which may be different in approach and potential solutions, one thing is for sure—municipal officials, taxpayers and legislators are looking for ways to reduce Maine's overreliance on property owners to fund school, county, municipal and state mandated services.

Work sessions for these bills have yet to be scheduled.

Let's go on with the show.

Post-Modern Policing and Future Forests

If politics is the art of the possible then the gallery theme in the state house is post-modern brutalist; visually interesting in its uncompromising style and conceptually challenging for anyone interested in crafting language or securing adequate resources to actually deliver a policy outcome. What is hidden from the view of a casual browser are the neglected structural elements that uphold the form and remain to deliver on the deficiencies of an aesthetic facade long after the performative aspects have adjourned; which in the case of state policymaking, is municipal government.

This week, the Criminal Justice and Public Safety (CJPS) Committee worked several bills aimed at reminding the gallery of the need to invest in taking care of the public safety infrastructure to uphold the art of the possible, while the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF) Committee held a public hearing on a bill to knock down the load bearing wall of local control to manage forest harvesting destined to build supportive structures elsewhere.

On Wednesday, the CJPS Committee

voted out three bills largely along party lines to address structural deficiencies and recognize a need to examine the straining underpinnings of police training which formed an MMA platform initiative. Another bill sought to invest in resources available at a caller's door for communities without a police department.

Two bills with work sessions this week took similar paths resulting in the same discussion; the lack of flexibility in law enforcement training certification, supported in large part by municipal wages, while remaining unresponsive to municipal needs. LD 723, *An Act Requiring the Maine Criminal Justice Academy to Develop a Nonresidential Basic Law Enforcement Training Program*, sponsored by Rep. Lajoie (Lewiston) directed the Maine Criminal Justice Academy (MCJA) Board to develop a non-residential curriculum path no later than July 1, 2027, and LD 639, *An Act to Improve Training Opportunities for Law Enforcement Officers*, sponsored by Rep. Crockett (Portland) simply adopted last session's MMA proposal to remove the

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HEARING SCHEDULE

For the week of March 24, 2025

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/>.

MONDAY, MARCH 24

Criminal Justice & Public Safety
Room 436, State House, 9:30 a.m.
Tel: 287-1122

LD 405 *An Act to Define "Solitary Confinement" for the Laws Governing Jails and Correctional Facilities*

LD 647 *An Act Regarding Telephone and Video Call Access in Detention and Correctional Facilities and Jails*

LD 931 *An Act to Amend the Law Allowing Incarcerated Pretrial or Presentence Individuals to Be Credited Time for Participation in Voluntary Work Projects in a Jail*

1:00 p.m.

LD 740 *An Act to Establish a Comprehensive Program to Divert Youth from the Criminal Justice System and Address Their Needs*

Environment & Natural Resources
Room 216, Cross Building, 11:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-4149

LD 795 *An Act to Exempt Pegmatite Mining from the Maine Metallic Mineral Mining Act and Establish a Permit-by-rule Process*

LD 1035 *Resolve, to Study the Safe Disposal of Single-use Propane Canisters*

LD 1073 *An Act to Amend Provisions of the Maine Metallic Mineral Mining Act to Advance Health Equity and Improve the Well-being of Vulnerable Populations*

Health & Human Services
Room 209, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1317

LD 389 *Resolve, to Increase Transparency and Evaluate Emergency Response Through a COVID-19 Review Commission*

LD 650 *An Act to Support Municipal Public Health*

LD 904 *An Act to Exempt from Fees Certain Services Performed by the Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory for Criminal Investigations*

LD 1078 *An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs*

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

LD 976 *Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township*

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

LD 986 *An Act to Eliminate the Crime of Felony Murder*

LD 1032 *An Act Regarding Court Security*

1:00 p.m.
LD 983 *An Act Regarding Service of Notice of Restricted Person Status to Hospitalized Patients*

LD 990 *Resolve, Requiring the Office of the Attorney General to Develop and Promote an Optional Online Registry Informing Landlords of Their Rights and Obligations*

LD 994 *An Act Regarding the Enforcement Provisions of the Law Governing Private Road Maintenance*

State & Local Government
Room 214, Cross Building, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1330

LD 556 *An Act to Preserve Heating and Energy Choice by Prohibiting a Municipality from Prohibiting a Particular Energy System or Energy Distributor*

LD 702 *An Act to Designate January 6th as A Day to Remember and to Preserve the Accounts of Witnesses to the Events of January 6, 2021*

LD 774 *An Act to Require Bleeding Control Kits in State-owned Buildings*

1:00 p.m.

LD 849 *An Act to Establish a Recall Process for Public School Board Members*

LD 915 *An Act to Modernize Deed Duplication from Microfilm to a Digital Image*

TUESDAY, MARCH 25

Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
Room 214, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1312

LD 1019 *An Act to Provide Funding for Fort McClary*

LD 1057 *Resolve, to Aid Municipalities, Animal Control Officers and Other Parties in Complying with Electronic Dog Licensing Requirements*

Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services
Room 220, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1314

LD 151 *An Act to Allow Businesses to Impose a Surcharge on Credit Card and Debit Card Transactions*

LD 969 *An Act to Increase Emergency Medical Services Provider Training Opportunities*

Housing & Economic Development
Room 206, Cross Building, 1:15 p.m.
Tel: 287-4880

LD 748 *An Act to Increase Bridging Rental Assistance Program Housing Voucher Funding to Reduce the Current Partial Waiting List and Increase Housing Vouchers for Persons Living with Mental Health Challenges*

LD 949 *An Act to Clarify Licensing Jurisdiction for Manufactured Housing Communities*

LD 970 *An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing by Expediting Reviews for Affordable Housing Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority*

LD 997 *An Act to Allow Residential Use Development in Commercial Districts*

LD 1016 *An Act to Establish the Manufactured Housing Community and Mobile Home Park Preservation and Assistance Fund*

LD 1041 *An Act to Preserve Affordability in Publicly Assisted Housing Developments*

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Post-Modern Policing and Future Forests.....cont'd

word “residential” from the current statute governing MCJA basic law enforcement certification.

Both bills received support from the Mayors Coalition, Maine Service Centers Coalition, Portland Police Department, and MMA pointing to the need for the long-starved academy to have adequate resources to develop a 21st century product, while MCJA, the Cumberland Police Department and Maine Sheriff’s Association (MSA) opposed the initiatives. The academy pointed to a lack of volunteer instructor resources and an ongoing job task analysis to realign training for the future as major barriers to additional instructional delivery. Cumberland denied there was a problem or a lack of resources necessitating a change, with MSA fearing a change may result in a dual model undermining standards for post-modern policing.

Proponents provided real world examples of lost candidates unwilling to suspend other life obligations and commute the long distance for effectively one evening home a week for 18 weeks, mature candidates retired from federal law enforcement who had already been through an academy not recognized as comparable, hoping to serve the communities they worked in for decades, and the lack of resources available to meet the needs of current demand, let alone prepare for the needs of a future workforce.

Recognizing that the current model creates the need for the academy to seek permission from political structures to ask for what it needs, the committee opted to vote out both bills along party lines with LD 639 “ought to pass” as drafted removing the word residential from current statute. An amended version of LD 723 would require a stakeholder group to dive down into the needs to achieve curriculum advancement

and training expansion with a report back to the committee and authority to report out a bill next year.

Another bill voted positively out of the CJPS Committee focused on improving the availability of behavioral health personnel within the Maine State Police through LD 298, *An Act to Employ Mental Health Personnel Within the Maine State Police*, sponsored by Rep. Underwood (Presque Isle). As drafted, the bill would provide communities served by the Northern Field troop, with the same benefit of Behavioral Health Coordinators as those in the Central and Southern Field troop, who provide far more services than just connection to mental health resources.

Diverting more than 1,200 calls since their creation, this small but mighty group has not only diverted calls spurred by the needed mental health services away from a police response, but also provided veterans and social work navigator resources for calls often presenting as strictly police-related. Most importantly, the positions have been invaluable for navigating a variety of situations which are otherwise siloed across other programs and often able to address any type of situation where there may be services available to aid the individual with a statewide lens beyond what is locally available.

The only opposition to the bill came from the National Alliance on Mental Illness Maine who shared that providing police with the mental health staff diverted necessary funds not invested in community resources into criminal justice resources. Unfortunately, the Behavioral Health Coordinators provide far more than a connection to mental health resources and are a proactive rather than reactive resource, with providers scanning call sheets for possible calls that could benefit from signposting unable to be asked

of overburdened rural police. The majority of the committee agreed, with a divided report tipped for ought to pass and a future battle on the appropriations table.

Timber Framed Ghosts Haunt Future Forests

The ghost light is a superstitious theatrical tradition of leaving a single bulb burning on stage when a theatre is empty providing light for theater ghosts or perhaps warding them off. On Tuesday of this week in the ACF Committee, a continual fire alarm could be perceived as the equivalent device for the “art of the possible” gallery by attempting to warn off ghosts of bad bills past. Nonetheless, the committee held a routinely interrupted public hearing on LD 261, *An Act Regarding the Authority of Municipalities to Regulate Timber Harvesting*, sponsored by Rep. Bunker (Farmington) which was a bill of legislatures past, and attempted to force all communities to prove they had met statutory guidelines for their local processes of adopting timber harvesting ordinances more than 30 years ago, for what the department claimed were roughly 30 ordinances they were not certain had done so.

Under current law, a municipality that adopts a stand-alone timber harvesting ordinance needs to notify the department and provide an invitation to attend a public hearing where the ordinance will be discussed and consult a forester before adopting an ordinance or adopt statewide statutory regulatory guidelines. These include the process under the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) guidelines that provide three paths to adopt shoreland zone timber harvest ordinances which include the statutory path under forestry or DEP guidelines in the shoreland zone, but municipalities are also encouraged to adopt more stringent guidelines in the shoreland zone to protect water quality.

A map available on the department website shows a clear pattern of municipalities who adopted the statewide standard by reference or function within their land use ordinances, the DEP path, or the hand full of bespoke informed processes, despite industry protests of widespread issues. A statewide structural problem with timber harvesting ordinances is non-existent, both supported by department testimony and their own map.

Cancelled but Rebooted: The Public Safety Health and Wellness Grant application process has been replaced with a new version, which is available here: https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/sites/maine.gov.dafs.bbm.procurementservices/files/rfps/RFA%20202503038%20Public%20Safety%20Health%20and%20Wellness%20Reimbursement%20Fund_Final.docx

A new public information Zoom has been scheduled for March 28 at 11:00 a.m. and can be accessed here: <https://mainestate.zoom.us/j/83915131382?pwd=8qfEBtKhmJTHVlV73iQrPENdt5NFI.1>

The new deadline for posing questions is March 31, no later than 11:59 p.m. and the grant submission deadline for all applications is April 11, 2025, by 11:59 p.m. Both questions and applications should be directed to proposals@maine.gov.

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HEARING SCHEDULE (cont'd)

For the week of March 24, 2025

Labor

Room 202, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1331

LD 206 An Act to Protect Maine Businesses by Eliminating the Automatic Cost-of-living Adjustment to the Minimum Hourly Wage

LD 853 An Act to Replace the Minimum Hourly Wage with a Regionally Based Living Wage

LD 941 An Act Requiring Employers to Disclose Wage Ranges in Job Postings

Transportation

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

LD 569 Resolve, to Rename the Shapleigh Bridge the Shapleigh Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 610 Resolve, to Designate a Portion of Route 234 in the Town of New Vineyard and the Town of Anson in Honor of Corporal Andrew L. Hutchins

LD 617 Resolve, to Rename a Bridge in the Town of Waterboro the Waterboro Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 621 Resolve, to Rename a Bridge in Mattawamkeag the Mattawamkeag Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 672 Resolve, to Rename the Salmon Falls Bridge Between Buxton and Hollis the Salmon Falls Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 685 Resolve, to Rename the Mill Pond Bridge the Sebago Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 686 Resolve, to Rename the Kezar Falls Bridge Between Porter and Parsonsfield the Kezar Falls Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 796 Resolve, to Rename a Bridge in Windham and Gorham the Little Falls Veterans Memorial Bridge

LD 862 Resolve, to Honor Scarborough Veterans by Renaming the Pine Point Crossing Bridge the Scarborough Veterans Memorial Bridge

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

Criminal Justice & Public Safety
Room 436, State House, 9:30 a.m.
Tel: 287-1122

LD 102 An Act to Notify the Public of Juveniles Who Are Wanted Persons

LD 496 An Act Regarding the Time Frame for Issuing a Silver Alert and to Require Silver Alerts for All Persons Missing from Certain Inpatient Facilities

LD 981 An Act to Provide Electronic Notification to Victims of Crimes

Education & Cultural Affairs
Room 208, Cross Building, 11:30 a.m.
Tel: 287-3125

LD 972 An Act to Change the Entity Responsible for Operating the Career and Technical Education Center in Machias to Regional School Unit 37

Energy, Utilities & Technology
Room 211, Cross Building, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-4143

LD 995 An Act to Provide Funding for Low-income Electric Ratepayer Assistance

Environment & Natural Resources
Room 216, Cross Building, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-4149

LD 56 An Act to Remove the 5 Cent Fee for Bags in Retail Stores

LD 69 An Act to Repeal the Law Restricting the Use of Certain Plastic, Paper and Single-use Bags

LD 1122 An Act to Amend the Law Banning Single-use Carry-out Bags

Judiciary
Room 438, State House, 9:30 a.m.
Tel: 287-1327

LD 424 An Act Concerning the Concealed Carrying of a Handgun by an Individual Who Is 18 Years of Age but Under 21 Years of Age

LD 677 An Act to Update the Statutory Definition of "Machine Gun" and Prohibit Possession of a Rapid-fire Device

LD 829 An Act to Standardize the Laws Regarding the Carrying of Concealed Handguns in State Parks

LD 953 An Act to Change the Definition of "Machine Gun" in the Maine Criminal Code

LD 998 An Act Regarding an Employer's Authority to Prohibit an Employee from Storing a Firearm in the Employee's Vehicle

LD 1049 An Act to Eliminate the Duty to Inform a Law Enforcement Officer When Carrying a Concealed Handgun Without a Permit

Labor

Room 202, Cross Building, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1331

LD 706 An Act Regarding the Laws Relating to Unemployment Insurance

LD 1025 An Act to Allow Federal Civil Service to Count for Purposes of Maine Public Employees Retirement System Benefits

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

LD 928 An Act to Maintain Public Access to Town Ways in Maine

LD 984 An Act to Require Every State and Municipal Building to Have at Least One Automated External Defibrillator

Taxation

Room 127, State House, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-1552

LD 908 An Act to Eliminate the Sales Tax on Prepared Foods and Support the State's Hospitality Industry

LD 1089 An Act to Permanently Fund 55 Percent of the State's Share of Education by Establishing a Tax on Incomes of More than \$1,000,000

THURSDAY, MARCH 27

Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
Room 214, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1312

LD 1072 An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Land for Maine's Future Program and to Authorize the Use of

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Let's Talk Voter Registration

Members were lucky enough to spend their St. Patrick's Day morning debating the merits of an initiative requiring voters to update their signatures at a work session in the Veterans and Legal Affairs (VLA) Committee. As detailed in an article featured in the March 14 *Legislative Bulletin*, LD 266, *An Act to Require the Updating of Voter Registration Signatures*, sponsored by Rep. Smith (Palermo), would require residents to update their signatures on voter registration cards every five years. The need for this bill was based on the sponsor's experience gathering signatures for office where, due to a change in penmanship, several signatures were marked as invalid.

During Monday's work session, committee members were reminded that the Secretary of State's (SOS) Office testified that the Central Voter Registration (CVR) software does not track the date that a signature is captured. As a result, if passed, not only would the SOS be required to update the CVR software, but also every municipality—at a significant price tag without a rainbow in sight to guide the search for a promised pot of gold. With no funding mechanism, the bill could be flagged by the Office of Fiscal and Program Review (OFPR) as an unfunded mandate.

Additionally, as drafted LD 266 doesn't specifically outline what happens if an individual does not update their signature and may conflict with the National Voter Registration Act. The committee analyst pointed out that, though not a "catch-all," licensed drivers are required to go into a Bureau of Motor Vehicles branch to renew their license at some point, though not for every renewal, and the committee may want to consider that approach.

The bill sponsor was asked to join the conversation and opine based on the analyst's

summary of the bill. Rep. Smith agreed that there are some issues to consider with LD 266 but felt that using the driver's license process would still disenfranchise those who do not have a license. At the very least, she would like to see an education campaign launched around the importance of updating voter signatures and the reasons why.

Rep. Hymes (Waldo) offered an "ought to pass as amended" motion, with the amendment turning the responsibility back to the municipality who invalidated the signature. He added that if a signature is deemed invalid then the clerk of that municipality should be required to reach out to the voter to encourage them to update their signature.

Without a second, the motion failed to move forward.

Patty Dubois, representing the Maine Town & City Clerks Association (MTCCA), was also asked to join the committee and confirmed that clerks already act when a voter's signature is deemed invalid on a petition. However, she also confirmed that due to federal laws, a clerk is not allowed to send a voter registration card to obtain an updated signature, but a separate signature card would be allowed.

Rep. Supica (Bangor) stated that sometimes signatures don't match and it's not a big deal. With that, she offered an "ought not to pass" motion that received a second. Rep. Boyer (Poland) stated for the record that he would not be voting for the motion since Rep. Hymes offered a reasonable path forward. Ultimately, the committee voted the bill out along party lines with a minority report of "ought to pass as amended," which would require a municipality to attempt to contact the voter.

Another bill of municipal interest previ-

ously tabled, also came before the VLA committee on Monday. LD 600, *An Act to Initiate Recounts in Tied Elections*, sponsored by Rep. Malon (Biddeford) aims to provide a mechanism for a recount when a tie occurs and neither candidate has requested a recount.

The discussion mainly revolved around whether the committee considered the bill an unfunded mandate and which mandate approach made sense for the committee to proceed. As described in last week's bulletin, the mandate options require the legislature either to adopt the bill with 90% state funding to cover the cost of implementing the new tasks or to override their constitutional obligation with a two-thirds majority vote. The failure to implement either option results in providing municipalities with the choice as to whether to implement the new task.

Rep. Malon offered an "ought to pass as amended" further stating that he does not believe LD 600 is a mandate due to the written testimony from MTCCA and the Maine Municipal Association. With that, the bill was voted out of the committee with almost all members in favor.

Rolling over to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee on Wednesday, a similar bill dealing with voter registration was having a work session. LD 734, *An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine's High Schools*, sponsored by Rep. McCabe (Lewiston), seeks to require secondary schools to hold voter registration drives. This bill was also flagged as a mandate.

The public hearing generated several questions about school curriculum and how registration drives would be reflected in learning results. Through her research, the committee analyst did not find anything specific to voter registration, although she noted that several references are made to civics education and democratic responsibility.

Another researched question was what other states were doing in terms of voter registration. The analyst provided the committee with a multitude of avenues that states take to approach voter registration activities.

Rep. Haggan (Hampden) added that as a social studies teacher for many years, she has a hard time believing that voting isn't talked about in schools when discussing civics. With that the bill was tabled.



POTHoles & POLITICS

"Potholes & Politics: Local Maine Issues from A to Z"

is a podcast about municipalities in Maine and the people and policies that bring local government to your doorstep. Check out our episodes:

MMA: <https://www.memun.org/Media-Publications/MMA-Podcast>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/1LR5eRGG1gS2qu5NRoCUS1>

Apple Podcasts: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/potholes-politics-local-maine-issues-from-a-to-z/id1634403397>

HEARING SCHEDULE (cont'd)

For the week of March 24, 2025

Options to Purchase at Agricultural Value

Energy, Utilities & Technology
Room 211, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-4143

LD 711 *An Act to Facilitate the State Meeting Its Climate Goals While Protecting Farms*

Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services
Room 220, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1314

LD 1053 *An Act to Ensure That Rebates from Prescription Drug Manufacturers Are Passed on to Patients at Pharmacies*

Marine Resources
Room 202, Cross Building, 1:00 p.m.
Tel: 287-1337

LD 968 *Resolve, to Study Stakeholder Input Involving the Appointment of the Commissioner of Marine Resources*

LD 1026 *An Act to Provide Mapping Services for Aquaculture Lease Siting*

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

LD 557 *An Act to Allow All-terrain Vehicles to Be Used on a Public Way*

LD 925 *Resolve, To Create a License Plate To Recognize the Semiquincentennial of the United States of America*

FRIDAY, MARCH 28

Transportation
Room 126, State House, 10:00 a.m.
Tel: 287-4148

LD 164 *An Act to Exempt Authorized Emergency Vehicles from Tolls When Operating in an Official Capacity*

LD 285 *Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Amend Its Rules Regarding Seasonal Load Restrictions on Certain State and State Aid Highways*

Post-Modern Policing and Future Forests.....cont'd

A stakeholder group was created in 2020 following the introduction of a “Right to Practice Forestry” bill out of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) national platform initiative which attempted to preempt all local regulatory processes. The group met several times uncovering that municipal ordinance adoption was not the problem, but technical resources of the department remained the biggest barrier and where communication and cooperation had occurred, issues with local ordinances were successfully addressed to the benefit of all. However, no central repository existed within the department that could provide a central location for a forest professional to find guidelines within the communities who had adopted ordinances under their full authority and most of those lived in paper files unsearchable at the time.

Proponents of the bill included the department, and industry representatives, with municipal leaders providing examples of the department being unaware of its own approval of ordinances, MMA, Maine Organic Farmers Association and Maine Appalachian Mountain Club in opposition. Many of the proponents spoke to theoretical understanding of what they believed the bill would do while opponents focused on the actual effect of the drafted language.

LD 261 would retroactively invalidate

ordinances going back to 1990 if they are deemed inconsistent with a town’s comprehensive plan - regardless of whether such a plan even existed at the time. This would expose municipalities to lawsuits on processes long after legal challenges expired, well beyond records retention requirements, and referencing periods when basic municipal communications around the process let alone digital records—were nonexistent. It would wipe out decades of carefully crafted local policy, throwing municipal planning into chaos.

One opponent, Eliza Townsend of the Appalachian Mountain Club shared the process for ordinance adoption would apply to those that were adopted when “George H.W. Bush was President, John McKernan was Governor of Maine, *Dances With Wolves* won best picture...,” not exactly a timeless

movie reference. Perhaps more importantly, or brutally, depending on your vantage point, it would place the burden of proof on municipalities who may have long since lost the staff involved in the process when the department itself still kept the ordinances in file boxes three years ago and would be unable to prove they had not been invited to the local public hearing.

LD 261 takes a jackhammer to the structural integrity of state standards in 460 municipalities, when the department could simply call the 30, they feel might be out of alignment with the processes. After all, the tallest timber frame building or “plyscraper” was just erected in 2022, surely they can find a place to recycle the 30 years of unread municipal paper and avoid requiring the extensive and unnecessary, unfunded mandate as the alternative.

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

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Maine Municipal Association, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330
207-623-8428 Website: www.memun.org

Editorial Staff: Kate Dufour, Rebecca Graham, Rebecca Lambert, Amanda Campbell and Laura Ellis of Advocacy & Communications. **Layout:** Sue Bourdon, Advocacy & Communications



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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.)

Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

LD 1057 *Resolve, to Aid Municipalities, Animal Control Officers and Other Parties in Complying with Electronic Dog Licensing Requirements (Emergency)* (Sponsored by Rep. Greenwood of Wales)

This emergency resolve provides that the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry may not require a municipality that has chosen to participate in the electronic dog licensing project to implement the use of PetPoint software or any other data management platform for a period of one year. The resolve also directs the department to establish a software user group consisting of municipal clerks, animal control officers, dog licensing agents and other interested parties from a proportionate number of communities of different populations to assist with transitioning the issuance of dog licenses to a data management platform.

Health & Human Services

LD 1078 *An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs* (Sponsored by Rep. Rana of Bangor)

This bill allows a certified hypodermic apparatus exchange program to

operate additional locations within the same county as the certified program provided the state is notified of the additional locations and there is a process in place for the proper disposal of syringes. The bill also requires the program to provide monthly data to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention on the locations of additional sites, the number of hypodermic apparatuses collected and disposed, and any additional data requested.

State & Local Government

LD 928 *An Act to Maintain Public Access to Town Ways in Maine* (Sponsored by Rep. White of Guilford)

This bill provides that if the municipal officers or county commissioners have declared a town way discontinued by abandonment and have retained a public easement for at least 15 years, the municipality, county commissioners or an abutter on the way may not gate, bar or otherwise obstruct the town way. The bill also provides that if the municipal officers or county commissioners have declared a town way discontinued by abandonment and have retained a public easement for less than 15 years, the municipality, county commissioners or an abutter on the way, acting with the written permission of the municipal officers or county commissioners, may remove any gates, bars or other obstructions in the town way.

LD 984 *An Act to Require Every State and Municipal Building to Have at Least One Automated External Defibrillator* (Sponsored by Sen. Moore of Washington Cty.)

This bill requires all state and municipal buildings to be equipped with at least one automated external defibrillator.