



**MEREDA**

**LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY WEEKLY UPDATE**

Friday, January 05, 2018

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

**SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE 128TH LEGISLATURE CONVENES**

On January 3, 2018, the Second Regular Session of the 128<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature convened to begin its review of more than 400 bills. Some of the larger issues facing lawmakers include funding the Medicaid expansion enacted by voters this past November, devising a regulatory and tax scheme for the sale of recreational marijuana, amending the state's citizen-initiated referendum process, and considering tax conformity in the context of the new federal tax law. Additionally, with six members of the Maine legislature running for higher office, including four who are in leadership positions, the stakes have been raised for members to try to finish their work on time, if not early. The session has a statutory adjournment date of April 18, 2018.

**GREEN INDEPENDENT PARTY AND UNENROLLED/INDEPENDENT MEMBERS GET CAUCUS ROOM, PART-TIME STAFF**

This month, the Legislative Council voted to provide caucus space and part-time staff to Green Independent Party member Rep. Ralph Chapman, and the six unenrolled/independent members of the Legislature. In 2017, Representatives Ralph Chapman, Marty Grohman, and Denise Harlow left the Democratic Party, and Representatives Kevin Battle and Norm Higgins left the Republican Party. The two other unenrolled independent members are Representatives Owen Casas and Kent Ackley. As members have left their respective parties, the vote margin in the House has shrunk to 74 Democrats and 70 Republicans. With seven legislators unaffiliated with the major parties, the Legislative Council agreed to provide space in the Cross Office Building for the unaffiliated members to caucus, and part-time staff to assist those members in their work. While the group of independents comes from a diverse political background, given the narrow margin between Democrats and Republicans, they could use their small but relatively significant numbers to develop impactful swing votes in the House during the Second Regular Session.

**US DISTRICT COURT JUDGE ORDERS RELEASE OF \$3 MILLION IN FEDERAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS**

Judge Woodcock of the US District Court for the District of Maine issued a decision yesterday directing Governor LePage to release \$3 million in US Department of Labor funds designated for job training and workforce development. The ruling was a result of a lawsuit filed by Coastal Counties Workforce Inc., a nonprofit organization that administers federal job training programs in southern Maine. Governor LePage has withheld the funds in an attempt to reduce the administrative overhead costs of operating three regional workforce boards. The Governor had expressed a desire for the workforce boards to be integrated into one central administrative program based in Augusta. Judge Woodcock, while giving a nod to the opportunity for greater

efficiencies, ruled that pursuant to federal law the funds had to be released within 30 days after they were made available to the state. The Governor's office has the option to appeal the decision to the 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

#### VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARS PUBLIC COMMENT ON BILL TO AMEND MAINE ELECTION LAWS

On Wednesday, January 3, the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs (VLA) held a public hearing on LD 1726, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Elections. The bill was submitted to the Second Regular Session by Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap, and proposes, amongst other things, to prohibit signature gathering for petitions at polling places and to restrict political activities at polling places to areas beyond a 50-foot-wide corridor extending from the polling place entrances to the voter parking and drop-off areas. Both proponents and opponents of the measure were outspoken at the hearing, presenting different points of view on signature gathering at the polls. The VLA Committee has not yet scheduled a work session on LD 1726.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above, please don't hesitate to contact MEREDA Public Policy Counsel Andrea Cianchette Maker (207) 791-1101, [amaker@pierceatwood.com](mailto:amaker@pierceatwood.com) or Elizabeth Frazier (207) 791-1155, [efrazier@pierceatwood.com](mailto:efrazier@pierceatwood.com).