



MEREDA

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY WEEKLY UPDATE

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

GOVERNOR LEPAGE DELIVERS STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Governor LePage delivered his final State of the State address to the Legislature on Tuesday, February 13. The speech, which lasted nearly an hour and a half, focused on the issues the Governor wants to pursue in his last months in office. Among his top priorities are proposals to bring Maine tax law into full conformity with new federal tax reform law, imposing the real estate tax on land placed in conservation, helping Mainers reduce their student debt, and preventing home foreclosures of elderly Maine residents.

DEADLINE PASSES FOR COMMITTEES TO REPORT OUT 60% OF BILLS; SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REMAINS ELUSIVE

February 9 was the deadline for legislative committees to have reported out at least 60% of the bills that have been referred to them. In fact, the overall percentage of bills voted out of committee by the 9th was 38%, far short of the 60% mark. However, the number is skewed because some committees have completed nearly all of their work while others have a long way to go. Meanwhile, the Governor has stated that he will not be submitting a supplemental budget and has called upon the Legislature to appropriate money to fund Medicaid expansion, which is scheduled to commence on July 1, 2018. Thus far, Democratic leadership has stated that a supplemental budget is not necessary to fund the first months of Medicaid expansion, and have suggested instead that any necessary additional funds may be appropriated a year from now.

NEW STUDENT DEBT RELIEF BOND BILL TO BE CONSIDERED

In his State of the State address, Governor LePage emphasized the need to invest in student debt relief to keep students in Maine and attract young people to come to the state. To accomplish this goal, the Governor recently introduced LD 1834, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Provide for Student Loan Debt Relief. The bill would authorize a \$50 million bond to provide funds for zero- and low-interest rate student loans and consolidations and refinancing of student debt for qualified individuals. To qualify, at a minimum an individual must live and work in Maine for at least five years following graduation. The bill was submitted by the Governor but is being sponsored by Rep. Grohman, an independent who recently left the Democratic Party. A similar bill was introduced last year by Assistant Democratic Senate Leader Nate Libby. It was carried over to this session, but it appears that the Legislature will primarily focus on the new bill as the vehicle for a student debt relief initiative. LD 1834 has not yet been scheduled for a public hearing.

RANKED CHOICE VOTING PROPONENTS SUBMIT PEOPLE'S VETO PETITION

On February 2, proponents of ranked choice voting submitted 72,000 signatures on a petition for a People's Veto to suspend the implementation of a recently-passed law to delay ranked choice voting. Last year, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court issued an advisory opinion, which stated that portions of the 2015 citizen-initiated ranked choice voting law were unconstitutional. In response to that opinion, the Legislature passed a law to delay the implementation of ranked choice voting until 2021 and repeal it completely at that time if the Constitution has not been amended. If the Secretary of State's office certifies that at least 61,123 of the signatures submitted on the People's Veto petition are valid, the portion of the law delaying ranked choice voting in primaries and federal elections will be sent to the voters as a referendum question in June.

SPOTTED UNDER THE DOME!



Governor LePage and Pierce Atwood Government Relations Specialist Alexander Price.

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 or Elizabeth Frazier (207) 791-1155, efrazier@pierceatwood.com.