



MEREDA

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY WEEKLY UPDATE

Monday, March 19, 2018

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

REVENUE FORECASTING COMMITTEE PROJECTS \$141 MILLION SURPLUS

The Revenue Forecasting Committee (RFC) presented a briefing to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs (AFA) Committee on Tuesday, March 6, 2018. The RFC has increased the General Fund revenue projections through the end of the current biennium on June 30, 2019 from a \$12 million surplus projected in December 2017 to a \$141 million surplus. The increase is attributed to projected increases in wages and salaries, in part due to the federal income tax reforms, and in Maine's sales and use tax collections. These surplus funds can be allocated by the Legislature by passing a supplemental budget or by appropriating amounts to cover fiscal notes associated with individual bills. Any amount not allocated will roll over to the next year of this biennium and not be placed automatically in the Rainy Day Fund. Meanwhile, there is no shortage of bills currently vying for funding, and the new revenue projections will undoubtedly impact work in the final weeks of this legislative session.

OPEGA DIRECTOR BETH ASHCROFT RETIRING AUGUST 24, 2018

Beth Ashcroft, the Director of Maine's Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA), has announced that she will retire on August 24, 2018. Under her leadership, OPEGA has risen to prominence as the state's top watchdog agency, and has issued oversight reports on issues ranging from state economic development incentives to capacity problems at the state's psychiatric hospital. Director Ashcroft's replacement will be selected by the Legislative Council, which is currently divided 5-5 along party lines. Director Ashcroft has indicated she would like to help get her successor up-to-speed before her departure. OPEGA is currently undertaking reviews of Maine's citizen-initiative process, Maine's bottle redemption program, certain tax incentive programs and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Last week, OPEGA was also tasked with investigating the Department of Health and Human Services' Child Protective Services processes.

MAINE CANDIDATES TURN IN PAPERWORK TO QUALIFY FOR THE BALLOT

The deadline to turn in nomination papers for party candidates seeking to place their names on the ballot for federal, state or county public office in the 2018 primary election was Thursday, March 15, 2018. Every two years, all 186 state legislative seats (35 Senate seats and 151 House seats) are up for election. Party candidates for the House were each required to gather at least 25 signatures from registered voters who live in their respective districts and who are from the same political party as the candidate, while party candidates for the Senate needed 50 such signatures.

This year, Maine will also elect a new governor. Party candidates for governor were required to turn in nomination papers with at least 2,000 signatures. Independent candidates have until June 1, 2018 to submit their papers, but must collect twice the number of signatures. For the gubernatorial race, five Republican candidates and seven Democratic candidates filed their papers by the deadline. There are currently five independents registered to fundraise with the Maine Ethics Commission, but we won't know the final shape of the independent candidate field until after the June 1 deadline. The primary election will take place on Tuesday, June 12, 2018.

SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE'S VETO TRIGGERS RANKED CHOICE PRIMARIES IN JUNE

The Secretary of State's office has certified that the requisite number of valid signatures was submitted to effectuate the people's veto of a law to delay ranked choice voting. The people's veto will send a referendum question to voters in June asking them to implement ranked choice voting for Maine's primary elections and federal elections. If the referendum question is not approved, the law delaying implementation of ranked choice voting passed by the Legislature last year will take effect and ranked choice voting will not be implemented unless voters amend the Maine Constitution before 2021. The immediate effect of the people's veto is that Maine will have ranked-choice primaries this June for all candidates for the Legislature, the governorship, and federal offices.

WORK ON BILLS CONTINUES AS DEADLINE PASSES

Friday, March 9 was the deadline for legislative committees to report out all bills under their jurisdiction. A couple committees met that deadline, but most committees are still dealing with a handful of bills. The Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee has the most bills, many of which are bond bills that have been through the public hearing process and await final consideration very near adjournment when other financial matters are also finalized. As bills move out of committees, the workload shifts onto the calendars of the House and Senate. To accommodate that shift, the Legislature is scheduled to hold House and Senate sessions three days a week beginning March 28, and five days a week shortly thereafter. The statutory adjournment for second regular sessions such as this one is set by Maine's constitution as the third Wednesday of April, which is the 18th, with leeway to extend that date twice by five legislative days.

LEGISLATIVE DATABASE

The legislative database is attached to this weekly report for your information. It contains any newly introduced bills we have identified of interest to MEREDA.

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.