

Weekly Montana Legislative Briefing 1-24-2021

Last week's activities:

HB 107. This bill would require a 2/3's majority vote on mill levies. The bill had very little support and a significant amount of opposition. The Fire Alliance sent in written testimony opposition to this bill. This bill was tabled in committee and is probably dead.

SB 80 had a hearing on Wednesday the 20th at 3 P.M. in front of the Senate Local Government Committee. The sponsor of the bill presented to the committee that a mistake had been made in the bill draft language that included all special districts when his intent was for only a few specific special districts that dealt specifically with some land use issues. An amendment was made that narrowed down the scope of the bill. The Fire Alliance originally opposed the bill, but as amended it was no issue.

HB 86 the Fire Authority Bill had a hearing in front of the Local Government Committee on Thursday afternoon. There was support from several Fire Chiefs as well as the Montana League of Cities and Towns and the Fire Alliance. The Montana Wood Products folks were still opposition. There is a potential fix being worked on to the opposition issue. The bill is awaiting executive action by the committee.

HB 169 came up for a hearing on Friday the 22nd in front of the State Administration Committee. The bill added language to the States ethics codes. The language had the potential to create a situation where local government or special district employees or volunteers could be in violation of ethics laws if they were compensated for their services. The language was very broad and could have a negative impact with local governments participation with DNRC, DES, or even many volunteer stipends programs. There were several organizations that opposed this bill including the MSPOA, League of Cities and Towns, the Fire Alliance as well as several individual Chiefs, and the Council of Profession Firefighters. This bill is awaiting executive action.

Upcoming legislation this week:

HB204 and 205 will have hearings on 1-27-2021. HB 204 would give volunteers a \$500,00 tax credit. HB 205 would give the employers of a volunteer a \$500.00 tax credit. Both bills will have a fiscal note attached.

HB 245 will also have a hearing on 1-27-2021. This bill would change the definition of permissible fireworks. There was a similar bill ran legislative session. This bill will need significant opposition. The Fire Alliance will be in opposition and your support will be needed.

Remember, with the COVID precautions this session there is the traditional way of testifying, in person or in writing or by emailing the committee, but testimony can also be done remotely by Zoom. For any that may wish to use this method, you must register 24 hours in advance, or by noon the preceding day.

Other upcoming items:

LC0627: This bill would strengthen the Move over law. The citation for speeding through an emergency zone would move to reckless endangerment of an emergency personnel and it would reduce the speed limit by half of the regularly posted speed limit, or to the temporary speed limit if a sign has been posted. The Fire Alliance will support this bill.

LC0729: This bill would sunset voted on mill levies after 10 years. This could have catastrophic effects on operating budgets. If this bill gets introduced the Fire Alliance will oppose this bill.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out!

Rich Cowger