

MT Legislative Brief – Week of February 22, 2021

HB421 was a bill that was introduced to give volunteer EMTs a retirement pension. Good idea with lots of support.....the only problem was the sponsor wanted to use 911 funds to pay for the contributions and put them in with the VFCA, but he failed to talk with anyone involved.....long story short, we hated to oppose it but the funding source was all wrong and no actuarial study done to see what it would do to the VFCA retirement. HB421 was tabled in committee today.

HB 382 was introduced to limit the use of exploding targets on state and public lands during high fire danger (red flag days). This bill passed out of committee and passed both readings in the house, by slight margins, but it has moved on to the Senate.

HB 215 the bill that allows the legalization of the sale of bottle rockets and roman candles was heard in front of the Senate Judiciary committee where it passed out of Committee and will be heading to the Senate floor. Despite several folks' efforts to oppose it, this bill is more than likely going to pass.

SB 178 the Bill to limit the State from adopting Sprinkler ordinances for single family dwellings had a head of steam from the moment it was heard in committee and sailed through the Senate. The bill has been transmitted to the House and we can and should try our best to stop it, but my gut is saying that this is going to be a tough road. Interestingly it was testified about the fact that our SFMO has been given a gag order on this bill as well as the fireworks bill and that seemed to draw some attention from some of the committee members, but we will see if it does any good or not.

HB 264 the bill to try to strengthen the Move over law was originally tabled by the committee "to do some work on it". The bill was brought off the table today. There was an amendment to the bill that removed the slowdown 20 miles per hour under the posted speed limit but described reasonable and careful about road conditions and included some language about temporary speed limits, in essence giving a department the authority to place speed limit signs out to reduce the speed going through accident scenes. It also increased the fines and labeled the citation reckless endangerment of an emergency worker, which is a big plus. The bill passed out of committee and was passed unanimously and will move on to the senate. This is a big deal and we really need to say thank you to Ross Fitzgerald for taking this on and fighting for it. He did some strong work behind the scenes.

SB289 is a bill that would eliminate the box on an application that requires you to check if you may have been a criminal record. On initial reading this was looking like something that we would want to oppose. We actually asked the sponsor to include public safety in the exemption language. He said he would look at it. Even if he will not it does not prevent an agency from having that discussion, in fact explains it later in the bill that it is allowed, he just wants the check box removed. Honestly, the feeling is there is no real harm in staying out of this one if we can, unless there is strong opinion otherwise.

HB 469 is a bill that would allow DES to utilize a portion of the Governors emergency fund to pay local jurisdiction for some of the cost of EMAC deployments upon their return, instead of having to wait for the requesting state to pay them. Then the fund would be reimbursed from the requesting state. This bill was heard in committee and was passed out of committee unanimously and will head to the house floor for vote.

There are still a couple LC's that are sitting out there.

LC 2644 is a bill draft that is ready to go that would help to clean up language between building code and the SFMO/ Local AHJs that create more of a working relationship. This was drafted to try to deal with a long-standing issue that we all realize and was brought to head recently in a codes issue in Central Valley's District. The LC has run into a snag, that being that the original bill sponsor has talked with DLI and they have stated that since the lawsuit is in place that there is not much they can do, which in turn puts the sponsor in a position to where it's very difficult to move forward with the bill. And that is the stance that seems to be reflected in other potential sponsors as well. If presented in front of a committee that this legislation is trying to "workaround" a lawsuit, it could run into trouble quick, and potentially make the situation worse. There is a very adverse emotion on the hill to anything that remotely looks like more government control, and that is evident by how fast HB215 and SB 178 are moving through the system despite significant opposition. We are still trying to take the approach to talk with the new administrative head of DLI. There is a directive that has been given to all new directors and department heads by the Governor that has emphasized finding areas to make state government more efficient and to cut red tape. We are hoping that by utilizing this directive that will give us reason to push for change with the new administration, rather than try to push legislation through.

LC1945 is a draft that is a joint resolution that would put together an interim study committee on how to bolster the States EMS systems. We will support this if it makes it to committee. Transmittal is March 3rd so if a bill or LC has not had the breath of life put into it within the next few days, then there isn't much hope for it.

Other things happening behind the scenes..... As I mentioned earlier, we are still working on trying to get a meeting set up with the new DLI administrator to visit about issue there. We did get an opportunity to meet with Amanda Kaster, the new Director of DNRC yesterday in Helena. It was a great meeting where we got to highlight the importance of State/ Local government partnership with regards to wildfire within the State.

This coming Monday evening I have been asked to participate in a discussion/ evening with Governor Gianforte his wife and several other Association leadership representing education, medical, public safety and service organizations.

Sorry for taking so long to get this out but, things have been busy on all levels.....feel free to call anytime, and I promise, I will try to get back to you within a "reasonable" amount of time!!!!

Take care everyone!

Rich Cowger