Montana Fire Alliance Legislative report

Week starting March 31st, 2025.

This starts the eleventh week of the legislative session. I have tried to color code the bills, red should be opposed, green should be supported, and black is still wait to see. I have highlighted the dates and times for upcoming hearings.

Notice that the list of tabled bills increased in number! Several of the bad bills did not survive transmittal, and a few of the good ones died as well. There are still a few that need to go away, and some that the Fire Alliance itself is taking a wait and see position on. That does not mean that particular Associations may not have vested interest in them, but the Alliance is not necessarily taking a position. April the 5th is the date for transmittal of revenue bills and bills purposing referenda and general joint resolutions.

**Active Bills - House**

**HB20** is sponsored by Rep Brewster. This bill would require levies to be in dollars rather than mills. Despite significant opposition this bill passed the House and the Senate and was sent to enrolling.

**HB 56** is sponsored by Rep. Buttrey. This bill would create a provider tax for private EMS services to get additional Medicaid funding. This bill excludes public providers, though we supported this bill as written in a cooperative manner with the private providers. The bill was heard by the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 68** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill would allow County Commissioners to initiate civil proceeds on other elected county officials if wrongdoing has occurred. This bill has passed the House and Senate and was sent to enrolling.

**HB 70** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill authorizes a study of wildland firefighting. This bill was transmitted to the Senate where it was heard in front of the Senate Nature Resources Committee and passed executive action by the committee.

**HB 84** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill would revise the liability and training for prescribed fires. This bill was requested by DNRC. This bill passed the House and has been transmitted to the Senate where it was heard by the Senate Natural Resource Committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 127** is sponsored by Rep Lew Jones. This bill creates permanent funding and eliminates the sunset on HB 883 from the last legislative session. This funding allows DNRC to contract additional resources such as additional helicopters, aircraft, and hand crews during the fire season and well as other preparedness items. This bill passed both the House and the Senate Natural Resource Committee.

**HB128** is sponsored by Rep. Jones. This bill would protect volunteers from termination by employers for responding to calls. This bill was supported by the Fire Alliance and various volunteers testified in support of the bill. The bill passed the, was transmitted to the Senate, and passed the Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs Committee and is awaiting 2nd reading on the Senate Floor.

**HB 129** is sponsored by Rep. Jones. This bill offers an income tax to qualifying volunteer emergency responders. This bill passed the House and was transmitted to the Senate. It was heard in front of the Senate Taxation committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 130** is sponsored by Rep Jones. This bill potentially authorizes the DNRC and local government to take action on fires located on federal grounds with five miles of jurisdictional boundaries and potentially charge cost incurred to the federal agency if appropriate action is taken on the fires. This bill passed the House and was transmitted to the Senate, where it was heard by the committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 136** is sponsored by Rep. Fitzpatrick and would allow insurance companies to provide discounts to policy holders who may make mitigation efforts for several types of potential claims. This passed the House and the Senate and has been sent to enrolling.

**HB 140** is sponsored by Rep. Schomer and would provide property tax relief to firefighters and law enforcement injured or killed in the line of duty. This bill was amended to include volunteers. The bill passed the House Taxation committee and was sent to the Senate Taxation Committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 144** is sponsored by Rep. Tillman and would add a fire service representative (MSFCA) to the State Building Code Council. This bill passed the House and the Senate and was sent to enrolling.

**HB 358** is sponsored by Rep. Shelly Fyant and would increase the VFCA retirement by $25/month. It passed the House, was transmitted to the Senate, where it was heard by the Senate State Administration Committee and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 547** is sponsored by Representative DeMarios and would require a consolidated city county to have a fire chief. This bill passed the House and was heard in front of the Senate Local Government Committee where it faced opposition from other fire services in Butte Silver Bow County, commissioner, and some local taxpayers. The bill is awaiting executive action by the committee.

**HB 621** is sponsored by Rep. Gist and would allow a first responder entity to establish a peer support program. The bill passed the House and was sent to the Senate Local Government Committee and was heard and is awaiting executive action.

**HB 651** is sponsored by Rep Regier and would allow for temporary door locks during emergency situations such as active shooter. This bill is interesting in that it specifically states the locks must meet life safety standards. We have asked for an example of what type of locks are being referenced. It passed the House and was transmitted to the Senate Local Government Committee where it passed the committee.

**HB 901** is sponsored by Rep Gist and would set up a special revenue fund that could be used for Fire Department grant programs for safety and heath purposes. The funds would come from grants and gifts and the grant would be administered by MTDES. This bill was just introduced and will be heard on the **1st of April by the House Local Government Committee.**

**Active Bills- Senate**

**SB 33** is sponsored by Senator Hertz and would require state buildings to be subject to state building code review. This takes the review out of the process of local authorities. This bill has passed the Senate and the House and has been sent to enrolling.

**SB117** is sponsored by Senator Zolnikov and affects mill levies. It would allow mill levy increases to be factor in the average of the previous year’s inflation rate, not to exceed 4%, but it cuts newly taxable property to varying percentages The Fire Alliance is consulting with MACo and MLCT to see the effect of this bill as it has some pros and cons. This bill is still awaiting executive action from the committee. The Fire Districts should pay attention to this bill.Since this bill has a fiscal note, it can go for a period past transmittal. This bill has passed out of the Senate and will now be heard by the House Taxation Committee.

**SB213** is sponsored by Senator Zolnikov and would allow building potentially to have only one stairwell for ingress egress. There is a provision for a requirement of the building to be equipped with an automatic sprinkler system though. This bill passed by the Senate and passed the House Local Government Committee.

**SB 243** is sponsored by Senator Boldman and would allow for four story mixed us building in residential areas in communities for five thousand or more population. This was amended from six stories in the Senate Local Government Committee. It passed the Senate and was heard by the House Local Government Committee where it is awaiting executive action**.**

**SB 266** is sponsored by Senator Trebas and would allow for triplex and four plex occupancies in residential areas on single home lots in communities of over five thousand population. This bill passed the Senate and will be heard by the **House Local Government Committee on the 8th of April.**

**SB 359** is sponsored by Senator Novak and would prevent cell phone use while driving unless the use of hands-free devices. This bill passed the Senate and was heard by the House Judiciary Committee. It is awaiting executive action.

**SB 362** is sponsored by Senator Tezak and would revise firefighter qualifications by changing the ability of a person with certain felonies in the past to still be able to serve. This bill passed the Senate and will be heard by the **House Local Government Committee on the 1st of April at 3 P.M.**

**SB 394** is sponsored by Senator Neumann and would include PTSD for first responders into workers’ compensation. This bill passed the Senate Business, Labor, and Economic affairs Committee and was heard by the Senate Finance and Claims Committee where it is awaiting executive action.

**SB 518** is sponsored by Senator Harvey and would transfer the licensure of emergency medical providers from the Board of Medical Examiners to DLI. The bill passed the Senate and was transmitted to the House where it has passed the committee.

**SJ13** is sponsored by Senator Fuller and requests a study of EMS delivery withing the State. This bill is needed and we should support this bill. This bill was heard in front of the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee and was passed and is awaiting 2nd reading on the Senate floor.

**Tabled Bills**

**HB 34** sponsored by Rep. Brewster. This bill would increase the disaster resiliency fund with DES. This bill passed the House Local Government and is now tabled in House Appropriations.

**HB 290** is sponsored by Rep Stafman and would regulate sales of certain products containing PFA’s. This bill also includes some specific language about the usage of Class B Foam and the need to contain runoff. PFA’s is a well-known carcinogen, but the language regarding runoff containment and cleanup could be troublesome for fire departments. The committee tabled this bill.

**HB 243** is sponsored by Rep Gist and is a bill that would give volunteer first responders a $1500.00 tax credit. The committee tabled this bill.

**HB 410** is sponsored byLukas Schubert and would change the percentages of voters required to pass a mill levy or bond. Similar to Senator Hertz’s SB 205, though the percentages are lower, still may be thresholds tough to meet. This bill had a hearing in the House state Administration Committee where it was tabled by the committee.

**HB 511** was sponsored by Representative DeMarios and would create a state grant fund to assist in building and maintaining fire service training centers. It was introduced and heard by the committee where it was tabled.

**HB 552 is** sponsored by Rep. Reavis and would include PTSD on the in workers compensation laws for first responders. This bill passed committee was referred to House Appropriations and was tabled in the Committee. There was an effort to blast the bill to the House floor and failed to get the fifty-five votes needed to make that happen. This bill is dead currently.

**HB 640** is sponsored by Rep. Thane and would allow airport firefighters into the FURS retirement system. The bill was heard in front of the State Administration Committee and passed the committee, and was referred to House Appropriations, where it was tabled. There was an effort to blast the bill back to the House floor, but it failed to garner the fifty-five votes needed. This bill is dead.

**SB 94** is sponsored by Senator Fuller and is a bill that would limit Union activities relating to using public resources. This bill was amended to exclude emergency personnel and passed the committee. This bill died on the Senate Floor.

**SB204** is sponsored by Senator Hertz and would sunset mill levies every 10 years and require voters to approve the mill levy. This is the bill that will not die! This bill had very stiff opposition and no proponents, was tabled in the committee, was blasted back onto the house floor where it died and was brought back to life a third time, this time with an exclusion of emergency services. It passed the second reading on the house floor with those amendments but was defeated on third reading.

**SB205** is sponsored by Senator Hertz. This bill would increase the percentage of voters that are needed to pass mill levies or bonds. The Fire Alliance, particularly the Fire Trustees, need to oppose this bill. This bill also had very stiff opposition and only one proponent. The committee tabled this bill.

**SB 254** is sponsored by Senator Hertz and would prevent public monies from going to organizations like MACo and MLCT and potentially the Fire Alliance to prevent them from lobbying the legislature. This was an extremely dangerous bill in limiting the ability to inform legislators on local or specific issues or how various laws may impact services. This bill was tabled in the Senate Committee, and an attempt was made to bast it back to the floor, and that attempt failed. This bill is dead.

**SB 277** is sponsored by Senator Regier and would prevent payroll deductions for union dues and political contributions by public employers. The committee tabled this bill.

**SB 331** is sponsored by Senator Trebas and would require state owned buildings to have automatic fire suppression systems. This bill was heard by the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee where it was tabled.

At this point there should be no new bills introduced, unless they have a fiscal note, but even then, they should be limited. We will keep watch to make sure that none of the tabled bills get attached to a bill with a fiscal note, but again, that should be limited in ability!

 Thanks to folks for testifying when they can on some of these bills. As always, we must provide as much of a unified a front as we can, when we can. That is where our strength lies!

Questions, feel free to call.

Chief Rich Cowger