Montana Fire Alliance Legislative report

Week starting January 20th 2025

This starts the third week of the legislative session. Here is what has happened so far and what to look for in the upcoming week:

**HB20** is sponsored by Rep Brewster. This bill would require levies to be in dollars rather than mills. This bill had significant opposition from various Cities and Counties and the League of Cities and Towns, but non the less has passed the House Taxation Committee. This will still need to pass the House as a whole before getting transmitted to the Senate. Fire Districts in particular should be watching this bill.

**HB 34** is sponsored by Rep. Brewster. This bill would increase the disaster resiliency fund with DES. This bill passed the House Local government committee and will be moved on to the house floor.

**HB37** is sponsored by Rep. Oblander. This bill would require the previous year’s budget tax amount and the next year’s budget estimated tax amount on the preliminary budgets. This bill has passed the Local Government Committee and will to go to the house floor.

**HB 56** is sponsored by rep. Buttrey. This bill is a rerun from last session establishing a ambulance provider fee program to be able to recoup monies form Medicaid. This bill was heard in front of the House Human Services Committee. This bill currently includes public providers and we supported this bill as written in a cooperative manner with the private providers. With said, we are working on a separate public provider program so as this bill advances, there may be an amendment coming that will exempt public EMS providers out of the bill so that they can be part of a separate program. This bill is still at the committee level awaiting executive action.

**HB 68** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill is also a rerun from the last legislative session in what was know as HB 32 and 33. This is the new version of HB 33 which was vetoed by the governor after passing both the House and Senate in the 2023 session. This bill has passed the Local Government Committee and the House floor. It has been sent to the Senate Local Government Committee.

**HB 70** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill authorizes a study of wildland firefighting. This bill will have a hearing in front if the Natural Resource Committee on the 22nd of January at 3:00 P.M.

**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 has yet to have a hearing scheduled.

**HB 127** is sponsored by Rep Lew Jones. This bill creates some permanent funding and eliminates the sunset on HB 883 from the last legislative session. This is the additional funding to DNRC that allows them to contract additional resources such as additional helicopter and aircraft as well as hand crews during the fire season and well as other preparedness items. The Fire Alliance testified in support of this bill as well as several other organizations. There was no opposition to this bill. This bill has passed the House Natural Resource Committee and will go to the House floor.

**HB128** is sponsored by Rep. Jones. This bill would protect volunteers from termination by employers for responding to calls. This bill was heard in front of the House Business and Labor Committee and was supported by the Fire Alliance and various volunteers testified in support of the bill. It is awaiting executive action.

**HB 129** is sponsored by Rep. Jones. This bill offers a income tax to qualifying volunteers emergency responders. This bill was heard in front of the House taxation committee on the 14th and was supported by the Fire Alliance. The bill had executive action onit and it has passed the committee and will be sent to the House floor.

**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 5 miles of jurisdictional boundaries and potentially charge cost incurred to the federal agency if appropriate action is taken on the fires. This bill was heard by the House Natural Resource committee and was supported by DNRC. There may be some amendments to the bill before it moves on.

**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 heard in front of the House Taxation committee on the 15th of January. The Fire Alliance supported the bill, even though at this time the bill applies primarily to paid first responders. The sponsor was made aware of this and may look at some amendments. It is still 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 was heard in front of the Loval Government Committee on the 14th of January. It is awaiting executive action. There was testimony in support of this from the MSFCA.

**HB 243** is sponsored by Rep Gist and is a bill that would give volunteer first responders a $1500.00 tax credit. This bill has been assigned to the House taxation Committee but has yet to be assigned a hearing date.

**SB 94** is sponsored by Senator Fuller and is a bill that would limit Union activities relating to using public resources. This bill will be heard in front of the State Administration Committee on the 22nd of January at 3:00 PM. This bill will face opposition from the labor unions.

**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 years’ inflation rate, not to exceed 4%, but it cuts newly taxable property to 50%. 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 will be heard in front of the Senate Taxation Committee on the 222nd of January, at 8:00AM. The Districts should pay attention to this bill.

There are several other tax bills and bills affecting fire service issues that have placeholder titles, some of which are starting to get some language attached. We will watch these and get information out on them with more details and potential hearing schedules.

Also we are tentatively planning on a legislative meet and greet the 29th of January at Jorgeson’s in Helena. More information to come on that.

Questions, feel free to call.

Chief Rich Cowger