Montana Fire Alliance Legislative report

Week starting April 7th, 2025.

This starts the twelfth week of the legislative session. Things will look a little different in this report, as I have separated out the bills we are still watching, the bills that were tabled and the bills that have passed both the House and Senate. 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.

 There are a couple of new bills on the list!

**Active Bills - House**

**HB 56,** sponsored by Rep. Buttrey, 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 passed the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee, the 2nd reading on the Senate floor and got rereferred tot eh Senate Finance and claims committee where it is awaiting a hearing date.

**HB 70** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill authorizes a study of wildland firefighting. This bill was transmitted to the Senate where it passed the Senate Nature Resources Committee and will have second reading on the Senate Floor today April 7th at 1P.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 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 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 has passed the Senate Natural Resources Committee and will be sent to the Senate floor for a 2nd reading.

**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 334** is sponsored by Rep. Barker and would allow the department of military affairs to use up to $2 MILLION in each year of the biennium for the disaster and emergency services division without a governor's declaration of disaster or emergency for personal services, including: (a) responding to and recovering from emergencies or disasters; (b) disaster planning, training, and validation of readiness; and (c) the financial administration and management of disaster and emergency programs. This bill has passed the House and passed the Senate State Administration committee and now will go to the Senate floor for 2nd reading.

**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 has passed the Senate State Administration Committee and will be sent to the Senate Floor for 2nd reading.

 **HB 511** is sponsored by Representative DeMarios and would create a state grant fund to assist in building and maintaining fire service training centers. This bill was tabled in committee, then got taken off the table and has since passed executive action by the committee and will be presented on the House floor for 2nd reading today, April 7th.

**HB 547** is sponsored by Representative DeMarios and would require that the municipal fire department in a consolidated city county have a director of fire or a fire chief who shall manage and control the department in the manner prescribed by the ordinances of the municipality. 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, commissioners, 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 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 passed the Senate Local Government Committee and second reading on the Senate floor and will be presented for 3rd reading today April 7th.

**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 heard and passed by the House Local Government Committee on Aril 1s and has been presented for both 2nd and 3rd reading on the House floor where it passed and has been sent to a hearing in front of Senate Local Government.

HJ 47 was just introduced by Rep Gist and Senator Harvey. HJ 47 would be joint resolution of the Senate and the House requesting an interim study of local government entity cooperation and consolidation. This could be an effective way to deeply examine some outdated laws and the potential for a fire authority bill.

**Active Bills- Senate**

**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 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 be heard by the House Taxation Committee on the 8th of April at 9 A.M.

**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 the Senate and passed the House Local Government Committee and is awaiting 2nd reading on the House floor.

**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 was heard by the House Local Government Committee where it is awaiting executive action.

**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 passed the Senate Finance and Claims Committee. The bill has been transmitted to the House.

**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 it passed the House Business and Labor committee so it will now go for 2nd reading on the House floor.

**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 has passed the Senate and has been sent to the House Human Services Committee where it will be heard on the 9th at 3 P.M.

**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. Like 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 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.

**BILLS THAT PASSED BOTH OUSE AND SENATE**

**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 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 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 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 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.

**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.

The legislative calendar is as below:

Leg Day 67 (April 5th): Transmittal of Revenue bills and bills purposing Referenda and General Joint Resolutions

Leg Day 69 (April 8th): Transmittal of Appropriation bills, and bills implementing general Appropriation bill.

Leg Day 73 (April12th): Transmittal of Amendments to General Bills

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