**Montana Fire Alliance Legislative report - May 5th, 2025**

The 69th Montana Legislative session officially ended on Wednesday the 30th of April after being in session for 85 days.

Bills passed by the Legislature go to the Governor who has 10 days after the session ends to either sign them or veto them, or if he does nothing, they become law. Below is the final status of bills.

**BILLS THAT PASSED BOTH HOUSE AND SENATE**

**HB20 (opposed)** is sponsored by Rep Brewster. This bill requires levies to be in dollars rather than mills. **This bill is now law**.

**HB 56 (supported)** 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. This bill has passed the House and Senate and was sent returned from Enrolling and has been sent to the Governor.

**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 been signed by the Governor.**

**HB 70 (supported)** is sponsored by Rep. Gist. This bill authorizes a study of wildland firefighting. This bill passed the House, was amended in the Senate, passed the Senate, and the House approved the Amendment so the bill was sent to Enrolling and has been returned and will go to the Governor’s desk.

**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 the Senate and will be sent to the Governor.

**HB 127 (supported)** 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 and has been signed by the Governor**.

**HB128 (supported)** 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 House and Senate and has been signed by the Governor**.

**HB 129 (supported)** 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. This bill passed the House and Senate and has been sent to the Governor.

**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 the Senate and has been sent to the Governor.

**HB 136** **(supported)** 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 signed by the Governor.**

**HB 140 (supported)** 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 and Senate and has been sent to the Governor.

**HB 144 (supported)** is sponsored by Rep. Tillman and would add a fire service representative (MSFCA) to the State Building Code Council. **This bill has been signed by the Governor.**

**HB 358** **(supported)** is sponsored by Rep. Shelly Fyant and would increase the VFCA retirement by $25/month. It passed the House and the Senate and has been sent to the Governor.

**HB 511** **(supported)** is sponsored by Representative DeMarios and would create a state grant fund to assist in building and maintaining fire service training centers. This bill has passed the House and Senate Committees and has been returned from enrolling.

**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 the Senate floor and has returned from Enrolling. It will now go to the Governor.

**HB 621** **(supported)** is sponsored by Rep. Gist and would allow a first responder entity to establish a peer support program. The bill passed the House and the Senate and will be sent to Enrolling.

**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 the Senate has been sent to the Governor.

**HB 901** **(supported)** 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 health purposes. The funds would come from grants and gifts and the grant would be administered by MTDES. This bill passed the House and Senate and has been returned from Enrolling.

**HJ 47** **(supported)** 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. This bill has passed the House and Senate and has returned from Enrolling.

**SB 33 (supported)** 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 been signed by the Governor**.

**SB117 (opposed)** 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 the Senate and the House. It has returned form Enrolling and now will be sent to the Governor.

**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 the House and has been sent to the Governor.

**SB 243 (opposed)** 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. It passed the Senate and the House and has been returned form Enrolling and will be sent to the Governor.

**SB 518** **(supported)** 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 the House and has returned from Enrolling.

**SB 362** **(supported)** 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 the House and is back from Enrolling and has been sent to the Governor for his signature!

**SB 394** **(supported)** is sponsored by Senator Neumann and would include PTSD for first responders into workers’ compensation. This bill passed the Senate and the House and has been returned from Enrolling.

**SB 518** **(supported)** 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 the House and has returned from Enrolling and has been sent to the Governor for his signature.\

**SJ13** **(supported)** 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 the House and has been returned from Enrolling.

**Tabled Bills**

**HB 34** sponsored by Rep. Brewster. This bill would increase the disaster resiliency fund with DES. This bill was 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 334** **(supported)** 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 but has now been tabled by the Senate Finance and Claims Committee.

**HB 410 (opposed)** 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 (supported)** 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** **(supported)** 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 (opposed)** 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 (opposed)** 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 (opposed)** 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** **(opposed)** 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 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 was heard by the House Local Government Committee and tabled.

**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** **(supported)** 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.

**SB 359** **(supported)** 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, where it was tabled. There have been 2 attempts to blast this bill back onto the floor, but so far both failed.

In total we tracked approximately 45 bills that made it actually the chamber floors, and another 63 drafts that had potential, but never got steam to get up and running.

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