

May 21, 2007

Greetings,

I often find it hard to believe how quickly another month has passed when I realize that it's time for a legislative update! So what's happened in the House of Representatives so far in May? Having finished the work on all of the bills originating in the House, we are now working on bills that originated in the Senate (and vice versa – this is “cross-over”). Most of what we have dealt with so far in terms of Senate bills are “early” bills – or those that have to go to a second committee (often to the Finance Committee because the bill requires an expenditure of State funds). For example, SB-169, 138 and 93 (discussed below) will now go to the Finance Committee. Some of the highlights include:

1. The House passed the Renewable Energy Act, which was signed by Governor Lynch on May 11<sup>th</sup>. The law could lead to new wind power, biomass and geothermal development in New Hampshire.
2. The House passed SB-235, providing support for New Hampshire dairy farmers and a dedicated funding source for the purchase of Agricultural Development Rights. This bill will now go to the Ways and Means Committee since it deals with a new revenue source.
3. The House approved SB-169, establishing a death benefit (\$100,000) to be paid to the family of a police officer or firefighter killed in the line of duty.
4. The House approved SB-138, requiring the Department of Health and Human Services to fund services to persons with developmental disabilities and acquired brain disorders within 90 days of eligibility (this should provide a permanent solution to the end of the waitlist).
5. The House also approved SB-93, which requires insurance coverage for early intervention therapy services (for example, speech and occupational therapy) for children (age 0 – 3) with an identified developmental disability and/or delay.

I should mention a frequent debate that occurs whenever the Legislature is asked to pass a bill that would require insurance companies to provide specific coverages (aka “mandates”). Opponents say mandates raise the cost of insurance (if companies have to provide coverage for more things, or reimburse at higher rates, they will have to raise rates). Proponents say that providing certain coverages now will save money in the long run (“an ounce of prevention...”). While these latter cost savings can be hard to measure, an increase in premiums is felt immediately. The Commerce Committee addresses these issues regularly (the House already passed HB 790, which extends insurance coverage to include young adults (under 26) who are residents of New Hampshire and may be part-time students or working part-time – often at a job without insurance benefits), and is always sensitive to this tension.

On the education front, the constitutional amendment (CACR 18) continues to be discussed in the Legislature and the media – justifiably. Some of the arguments for the amendment include:

1. Targeted aid is necessary to address inequities between school districts;
2. Establishes a level of certainty for towns to set budgets;
3. Does not say how the state must fund (so could be an alternate revenue source down the road); and
4. 50% is a floor, not a minimum (though it is unlikely any number will pass the House to be included in an amendment).

And some of the arguments against the amendment include:

1. Role of court going forward unclear;
2. Does not address intra-town inequities;
3. Doubtful will prevent future litigation; and
4. Unintended consequences (what State might do in future by changing definition of adequacy and/or funding levels - and how towns will therefore continue to be affected).

I'm still gathering information (I believe the details are all-important here), and it is still a fluid conversation. I certainly welcome your input on this important issue. Other education measures that have been approved by the House include SCR 2 (urging Congress to amend the No Child Left Behind Act) and SB-18 (raising the age of required attendance of children in school from 16 to 18). Funding for alternative education programs (SB-101) also passed the House. Both bills now go to the Finance Committee.

I am available by phone (603-504-2744) or by email ([matthewhoude@yahoo.com](mailto:matthewhoude@yahoo.com)) to answer questions. Thank you, and enjoy spring – finally!

Regards,  
Matthew Houde