

Legislative Liaison Updates

March 23, 2011

SB1 – Eliminating the automatic continuation requirement for public employee collective bargaining agreements; known as the “Evergreen Clause”

This bill was approved by the Senate in February and became law in early March. Repealing this is considered a win for municipalities across the state as it will take away the requirement to continue to pay step increases or other pay increases (not COLA’s) if a new contract is not agreed on. This will provide an incentive for the unions and municipalities to come to an agreement on contract renewals.

SB3- New Hampshire Retirement System Reform

Both the House and the Senate continue their commitment to addressing the concerns over the growing liabilities and rising costs associated with the Retirement System. This bill by the Senate takes a comprehensive approach by addressing the retirement age, number of years used and what compensation to be used in the calculations, employee contribution rates, etc. These positions have had and continue to have the support of this Council. SB3, with amendments, passed the first round by an overwhelming 19-5 roll call vote on Wednesday, March 16th. It will be reviewed next by the Senate Finance Committee and will be subjected to another Senate vote before going to the House. The House is currently working on **HB580** which is their version of retirement reform. It is still in Committee with Executive Sessions throughout this week, if needed.

SB133- Reestablishing the exemption from property taxation for telecommunications poles/conduits

Last year, SB492 was passed to repeal the Pole Tax Exemption for telecommunication companies. The Senate has proposed this bill to reestablish the exemption. It passed the Senate by a voice vote on March 9th by what was believed to be a narrow margin. It has been sent to the House Municipal and County Government Committee where they will hold a public hearing tomorrow (03/24/2011) at 10 am. As one of our state reps, Councilor Hooper sits on this committee and is opposed to this exemption. Additionally, this Council unanimously opposed this exemption last year when it was defeated and continues to support telecommunication companies paying their fair share of property taxes. A special thanks to Councilor Hooper.

HB1 and HB2, both relative to cuts in the state’s budget, are in the three divisions of the House Finance Committee who are working diligently to finalize their recommendations to bring to the full committee this week. They will present to the House on March 29th for a full vote on Wednesday March 30th. There are key elements in these bills that could be considered a source of downshifting that would cut funding to the local level: eliminating welfare services, eliminating certain auto registration fees, maintaining or eliminating current contributions to the retirement system, a freeze on Rooms and Meals distributions, etc.

SB83- Enabling municipalities to create other post-employment benefits (OPEB) trusts

This bill would create enabling legislation to allow municipalities to more accurately and responsibly plan for the paying of OPEB by allowing an option to invest monies into a trust to pay for these expenses on a regular basis so as not to “pay as you go”. This was re-referred to the Public and Municipal Affairs Committee for further work. No action is expected before the end of the session, but will come back next year after questions are expected to be resolved over the summer and fall. A special thanks to our Senator Merrill for sponsoring this bill for much needed legislation.

School funding: There are a number of bills in process that relate to education aid that are constantly evolving so nothing specific to report on at this time. The areas that these bills cover are universal with the level of funding for Adequacy Aid, Catastrophic Aid and School Building Aid.

Councilor Bill Garrison