

Maine Legislative Update

The number of bills coming out of the Revisor's office has slowed to a trickle, and legislative committees are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel. Most committees appear on track to finish their work next week, although few heavy workload committees could extend beyond next week. Meanwhile, the daily House and Senate calendars are growing longer as more bills exit committee and come to the floor for action. Here are some updates from the week in Maine politics and policy:

Labor Committee considers paid family leave bill. On Thursday, the Legislature's Labor and Housing Committee held a public hearing [on a long-awaited bill that would implement a paid family and medical leave program](#) in the State. The bill, [LD 1964](#), is championed by Senate Assistant Majority Leader Matthea "Mattie" Daughtry (D-Cumberland) and House Assistant Majority Leader Kristen Cloutier (D-Lewiston), and if adopted, it would allow workers at public and private businesses to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave, with weekly benefits set at 90% of their salary capped at the State's average weekly wage. The bill exempts employers with fewer than 15 employees from making employer contributions to the program; however, Sen. Daughtry and Rep. Cloutier stated Monday that a forthcoming amendment will protect employees at companies with fewer than 15 workers unless their employer applies for an "undue hardship" exemption. The bill was opposed by most business associations, who argued that the program should be scaled back to avoid hardship on employers and employees in the State. The bill was supported by worker groups who argued that the bill was needed to protect workers and their families facing medical and related hardships. [Governor Mills' Administration testified neither for nor against the bill](#) and recommended that the "undue hardship" exemption be strengthened and suggested that an employee be required to be employed at a single employer for 120 days, barring unforeseen emergencies, before they can take paid leave under the proposal, among other things. The bill will be further considered in the coming weeks.

Lawmakers consider bills to reform State's bottle redemption program. On Wednesday, the Legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee held work sessions [on two bills that would modernize Maine's 45 year-old returnable beverage container program](#). Both bills, [LD 1909](#) and [LD 1910](#), would alleviate the burden of requiring bottle redemption centers to sort containers in hundreds of different categories, focusing instead on sorting bottles by materials (plastic, aluminum, or glass) in order to reduce their workload. One bill, backed by the Natural Resources Council of Maine, would require beverage container distributors to pick up recycled bottles more often than once every two weeks, which is the current standard. Beverage distributors oppose that proposal and also oppose the proposal to reinvest unclaimed Maine bottle deposits, which are worth approximately \$10 million per year, into the State's bottle bill system. The various stakeholders are working on a compromise proposal to the bills, and the Committee will hold another work session next week on these measures.

EUT Committee considers bill to modify Net Energy Billing Program. On Wednesday, the Legislature's Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee considered [a bill that would modify the state's current Net Energy Billing \(NEB\) solar program](#). The NEB program provides discounts to electric customers who subscribe to community solar projects, and the direct costs of the program are passed on to all electricity customers as a so-called "stranded cost." The bill, [LD 1986](#), sponsored by Sen. Mark Lawrence (D-York), would require the Public Utilities Commission to better define the cost of the program using more precise data and annually report this information to the Legislature. Several solar developers and environmental groups supported the bill at the public hearing, while Central Maine Power and Versant opposed the bill. Lawmakers are also considering another bill, [LD 1347](#), which is sponsored by Rep. Steven Foster (R-Dexter). An amendment to that bill put forth by [Public Advocate William Harwood would roll the NEB program back](#) to how it operated prior to a 2019 expansion. Both bills will be further considered in work sessions next week.

Judiciary Committee hears testimony on privacy bills. On Monday, the [Legislature's Judiciary Committee heard testimony on two bills relating to consumer data privacy](#). One bill, [LD 1973](#), sponsored by Sen. Lisa Keim (R-Oxford), is modeled on a Connecticut law and is supported by a wide range of business groups who argued that the proposal was comprehensive and fair to consumers. If adopted, this bill would also repeal a 2019 internet privacy law that applied only to internet service providers, which law was unsuccessfully challenged in court. Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey testified against the proposal to repeal the 2019 law, arguing that the proposal's exemptions were too broad and that the proposal would weaken consumer protection. The Attorney General's Office, along with the ACLU of Maine and the Maine Broadband Coalition, are instead supporting [LD 1705](#), sponsored by Rep. Margaret "Maggie" O'Neil (D-Saco), which bill is a reprise of an unsuccessful 2022 legislative proposal modeled on an Illinois law that would allow consumers to opt-in to the use of their biometric data, including facial recognition, enforceable by a private right of action. The Committee is working to carryover both bills, along with several other privacy bills, for action during the 2024 legislative session.

We hope everyone enjoys their long (and hopefully sunny) holiday weekend. The House and Senate will be in session next week on Tuesday, May 30 and Thursday, June 1, and policy committees will also hold what they hope will be their final public hearings and work sessions throughout the week. Until next week, stay safe and be well!

Printed Legislation

L.D.s 1994 to 2003 have been printed. The following bill(s) appear to be of interest to Maine County Commissioners Association

Calendar

Below is a hearing calendar of the bills of interest to Maine County Commissioners Association. If there are additional bills that you would like us to track, please let us know so we can add them to our calendar system.

Date	Time	Committee	LD	Description
May. 29 (M)	8:00 AM	House & Senate		Memorial Day - Holiday
May. 30 (Tu)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 1 (Th)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 1 (Th)	1:00 PM	LAH Cross Building, Room 202	1190	An Act To Ensure A Fair Workweek By Requiring Notice Of Work Schedules (WS)
Jun. 1 (Th)	1:00 PM	LAH Cross Building, Room 202	1794	An Act To Enhance The Predictability Of Mandated Overtime For Pulp Or Paper Manufacturing Facility Employees (WS)
Jun. 1 (Th)	1:00 PM	LAH Cross Building, Room 202	1964	An Act To Implement The Recommendations Of The Commission To Develop A Paid Family And Medical Leave Benefits Program (WS)
Jun. 6 (Tu)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session

Jun. 7 (W)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 8 (Th)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 12 (M)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 13 (Tu)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 14 (W)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 15 (Th)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 16 (F)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 20 (Tu)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session
Jun. 21 (W)	10:00 AM	House & Senate		Session