

LD 1824

An Act To Provide Additional Authority to the State Board of Corrections

Last week the Maine Legislature passed to be enacted *LD 1824 – An Act To Provide Additional Authority to the State Board of Corrections*. Since it was an emergency bill in the 126th Legislature, it required a 2/3 favorable vote to be approved. It is yet to be determined if Governor LePage will veto the bill.

This legislation was born from work done last fall by a commission appointed by the Legislature to look at operations of the State Board of Corrections and the county correctional system. The commission worked diligently to evaluate problems associated with the unified corrections system and developed a set of recommendations that ultimately morphed into LD 1824. Further complicating the issue in the Legislature, however, was that a supplemental corrections system funding appropriation request for the 2014 budget year was tied to the passage of legislation that would address problems with the current system.

In order for Maine counties to develop a policy position on the proposed legislation it was necessary to hold several meetings of stakeholders that included county commissioners, county sheriffs, county managers and administrators, MCCA and MSA staff, and others. All points of the proposed legislation were evaluated and discussed, and those present voted on position statements associated with each point. After reaching a consensus on an overall policy position for the Maine County Commissioners Association and the Maine Sheriffs Association that everyone involved could support, MCCA representatives prepared and brought testimony before the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee (CJPS).

MCCA's and the MSA's involvement and suggestions were well received by the CJPS committee, but not all recommendations were included in the final amended version of the legislation. However, the final product continued to be supportable by the MCCA and MSA due to cooperation among participants to reach consensus on a position all could live with and support. A few opponents continued to be dissatisfied with the legislation, however, and spoke against the bill and additional authority for the Board of Corrections.

MCCA continued to lobby legislators throughout the legislative process, explaining key points of the bill and why their support was crucial for achieving success. Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee worked effectively with their counterparts in the Legislature to convince them why the legislative revision was needed to improve the Board of Corrections and the county corrections system. Our hard work was rewarded with the receipt of more than a 2/3 majority of legislators voting in favor of LD 1824 in both houses.

It is reported that Governor LePage said he would veto the bill, but that remains to be seen, as no veto message is shown on the Governor's web site for LD 1824 at this writing. If he does indeed veto the bill, it will be reconsidered by the Legislature when members return for "veto day" May 1st to deal with the numerous bills Governor LePage has vetoed.

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Needless to say, the passage of this legislation is very important to Maine counties, as it provides a framework for a unified county corrections system to work better and remain under county management control. The main ingredient required for success of this venture, continues to be the receipt of sufficient funding from the State of Maine, since the tax cap on corrections expenditures remains in effect at the county/municipal level.