

## First Quarter 2016 Montana Government Affairs Report

The days are longer, the sun is shining, and the first quarter of 2016 is behind us. Political work is getting up, over 50 bill drafts have been submitted for consideration by the 2017 Montana Legislature, and legislative interim committees are starting to discuss legislative proposals on key topics such as mental health reform, regulating air ambulance services, and investing in State Gov't 1-1. A School Funding Commission is also evaluating the current education funding model and determining if adjustments or changes are warranted.

Legislative Council has started preparation activities for the 2017 Legislative Session to begin on Monday, January 2, 2017. The council is seeking information from legislators on proposed rule changes and will consider proposals on TMM, best practices for legislative models and guidelines for legislator appointments to committees and commissions in May. (Rep. Bob Gorman - Big Sky)

The Children, Families, Health and Human Services interim committee at its March meeting agreed to consider legislation on topics related to its study of guardianship and Alzheimer's Disease, along with several mental health proposals tracking children's mental health. In 2015, the legislature invested nearly \$10 million in new money to mental health, specifically expanding community-based services. CFHHS is also tracking child protective services and will be considering options for changing Montana's process for handling cases in May. Updates on the Montana Development Center facility and transition and Medicaid expansion were also presented in March. CFHHS next meeting in May 7 in Helena. (Rep. Al Oberwald - Kalispell)

Economic Affairs interim committee is studying air ambulance issues related to cost transparency and disclosure and reimbursement issues. A working group led by the Commissioner of Insurance is underway and includes representatives from Kalispell Regional Healthcare and other state facilities. The working group will present recommendations to EAC on April 14. EAC is also focusing on licensing boards and their potential to limit competition, along with funding options for licensing boards. Finally in April, EAC will discuss broadband issues across Montana and how wireless networks supplement broadband connectivity.

The Energy and Telecommunications interim committee has been working on several proposals to update Montana's 9-1-1 laws and recommend measures to update Montana to "Next Gen 9-1-1". The recommendations came from a stakeholder group that considered technology enhancements, governance and costs. To prepare for the transition, Montana will work with individual counties across the current use of GIS data and operations in Montana counties. The costs of the Next Gen transition is approximately \$2 million that will come from existing accounts designated for this update. ETC is also continuing to work on net metering and trying to find workable solutions to the costs and benefits of net metering in Montana. ETC has agreed that residential cooperatives, such as Flathead Electric, should not be subject to net metering laws and should receive their own net metering programs. ETC will meet in Kalispell on May 12-13. (Rep. Keith Boyer - Kalispell)

Education and Local Government and a School Funding Interim Commission are exploring enhancements to education funding, the needs of school facilities across the State and career and technical education in secondary schools, Flathead Valley Community College, along with Montana's two other community colleges, will present information on enrollment, programs and plans for the future. The committee will also review dual credit enrollment (a program for high school students to receive college credit while in the MT University System) and discuss charter schools. Business, Prof., and Libby have submitted applications to seek charter school designation.