



January 24, 2020

# Your State House Concord, New Hampshire



To my constituents in [Allenstown](#), [Epsom](#), & [Pittsfield](#):

This week, we continued with a heavy load of public hearings on new bills. I presented my HB 1648, which legalizes private use of cannabis and growing it for personal use. Unlike previous bills, there is no allowance for commercial sales: no regulation, no taxes, no fees, and the prohibition on selling cannabis (also on public use, giving it to minors, and driving under the influence) remains law. There was a crowd of supporters, and one opponent, at the hearing; I expect it to pass the House, but the Senate remains an open question.

I also presented my HB 1673, which includes not for profit organizations that receive significant government money under the right to know law. This was a request of the governor's office, which pointed out that the contracts with these organizations give the state access to their records, but not the public. There was some confusion at the hearing, with one representative on the committee asking about vendors (which are for profit entities, so not included) and another asking about governor and council oversight (which, as far as I can tell, is fairly minimal.) The not for profits were out in force, as usual – this idea has been brought forth pretty much every session, and they shoot it down. One member of the committee is planning to redefine significant to 50% or more of their budget, which I support and hope he can convince the rest of the committee!

An important bill before my committee is HB 1341, which repeals for police and fire some pension changes passed in 2011 which affected employees who weren't vested at the time. Normally, as many people pointed out, such changes only affect new hires; these have created

multiple tiers of benefits which are causing problems in some departments. This bill fixes that at a cost of about \$140 million, to be paid for by employers (towns, mostly) over the next 20 years. I expect a debate over this in committee and in the House, whether the undoubted benefits are worth the price.

We also heard bills attracting much less interest, as usual. HB 1122 adds suicide by first responders to the line of duty deaths eligible for the \$100K benefit; HB 1550 includes death by heart attack or hypertension to the list of eligible situations. I tend to oppose both of these, but perhaps the subcommittee working on them will narrow the focus. HB 1494, adding “heavy equipment operators” to the first responders eligible for a line of duty death benefit, was very loosely written and needs a great deal of work.

HB 1561, allowing a county to exempt its chief administrator from the retirement system, has minimal fiscal impact since there are a maximum of ten people involved, and one of the main paths to county administrator is through local and state government ranks, who have been in the system and would expect to continue. Those affected are those who came in as county administrators from the private sector or from out of state, who will likely not stay on the job long enough to benefit from starting in a new pension system.

HB 1204, extending the emergency exemption for part time work by retirees to training by local police or fire companies, seems reasonable. HB 1634, allowing persons who worked a part time job for a different employer when they retired from their full time job to continue their part time work without the 28 day hiatus required by the retirement system, was put in for a specific constituent, and may be more complex than it seemed initially. A subcommittee is working on it.



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HB 1434, repealing premium contributions for Medicare eligible retirees eligible for the state medical subsidy, was a contentious hearing. The retirees asserted that they had been promised free medical care for life, and that any payment was an imposition; however, as this is a self-funded plan, and they pay only 10% of the cost of their coverage (about \$32/month/person for a *very* generous plan), any cut to their contributions simply requires the non-Medicare eligible (who pay over \$300/month) to pay more. A lot more, since there are many more Medicare eligible retirees than otherwise.

I presented my HB 1580, on drones, to the committee, with the expected opposition from people who remembered previous bills. I went to a meeting of drone users in state government, and am rewriting the bill to more clearly focus on the real concerns (namely, law enforcement surveillance without a warrant, and invasion of privacy by non-commercial users, often neighbors playing with their new toys.)

HB 1447. allowing retirees to work more than the statutory limit for part timers, had a penalty of 23% of their pay for the rest of the year rather than loss of their pension (less their contributions plus earnings) for the following year. The intention was to allow part time police to work more hours, but the bill was not limited to police (or even Group II, which includes police, fire, and corrections) and the penalty would be an administrative nightmare to enforce. HB 1318, requiring security details for out-of-state political candidates be licensed in New Hampshire, was brought by a new representative who assumed (incorrectly) that Secret Service, out of state police officers, and out of state licensed bodyguards were exempted. The concern was some poorly trained “security” personnel from a campaign that roughed up a constituent, but it

doesn't sound like a licensing issue to me.

HB 1235, a study committee on enhancement of the retirement system, is an attempt to generate more generous pension benefits for government employees. HB 1205, shifting the 10% reduction in pensions for Group I retirees (teachers and employees) from age 65 to the Social Security “full retirement age” (up to age 67), would cost local taxpayers (primarily in school districts) over \$3M per year for the next 20 years. I'm opposed to this, since it's a \$37M hit to the retirement system's unfunded liability, and a charge on local property taxpayers.

HB 1189, repealing the ban on any compensation for members of the genetic counselor's governing board, will allow the board to pay expenses and per diems if appropriate. There are many more genetic counselors than we anticipated, so the board has a lot more work than expected. Genetic counseling is very well suited to remote work, and most of the licensees aren't physically in New Hampshire. HB 1407, on forms in rules, is a complex change requested by JLCAR. I'm on the subcommittee to work through the differences between the staff and some of the agencies writing rules.

HB 1574, on state health savings accounts, is an attempt to get the state government to act as a health insurance company and provide high deductible, no state mandate plans for anyone on the state to use, and then have those people also get health savings accounts. Well intentioned, but unworkable: better we should address the mandates that forbid private companies from offering this sort of plan.

HB 1714, amendments to the state building code, is a planned bill to incorporate amendments approved by the building code review board and the fire control board (amendments to the fire



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code) since we updated them to the 2015 versions 782-4918 last year. The hearing was complicated by having amendments that should have been included last year being added to this bill, but I expect it to pass.

HB 1498, adding a state hiring preference for civilian national service alumni, based on the existing preference for military veterans, had rather sloppy definitions and would apply to every state agency, rather than the Bureau of Personnel. It's in subcommittee. HB 1253, creating an advisory council for dispensers of eyeglasses and contact lenses, is a step by the professional organization towards licensing. Right now, dispensers are simply registered, and have almost no requirements to start work; if they become licensed, there will be training and education requirements rather than the current on the job learning.

HB 1222, adding a drone user to the aviation users advisory board, seems straightforward. HB 1188, repealing conditional licenses for allied health professionals pending criminal record checks, is no longer needed since the criminal record checks are now taking only a few days, rather than the weeks or months necessary a few years ago. The State Police have tremendously improved their responsiveness on this issue, and it's so nice to see a problem actually solved rather than worked around!



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