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2015 Legislative Update



**Have questions?
Get answers.**

- Welfare Fraud Hotline: (866) 348-1129
- Attorney General's Consumer Mediation Service: (800) 436-2131
- Business Answers Line: (800) 872-3838
- Statewide health and human services directory: Dial 211
- Information on construction, traffic delays or road conditions: Dial 511
- Northern New England Poison Control Center: (800) 222-1222
- Child Abuse Hotline: (800) 452-1999
- Elder Abuse Hotline: (800) 624-8404
- Legislature's message line: (800) 423-2900

Your feedback is important as we work on issues that impact our community and state. Please contact me with your thoughts any time.

To sign up for regular State House updates, including laws under consideration, issues that may impact our community and information on state resources, discounts and rebates, send me an email at:

Erik.Jorgensen@legislature.maine.gov

Dear Neighbor,

If you listen to the media, you've probably heard about all the contention and discord in Augusta. And to be sure, it's been a challenging year. But, despite the headlines, the Legislature managed to achieve some significant bipartisan accomplishments benefitting all the people of Maine. I worked especially hard to voice issues that affect Portland, assuring that our city is always represented in legislative and budget discussions.

I'm pleased to report that we passed legislation and a bipartisan budget that puts Maine's middle class first.

Some highlights of the first session of the 127th Legislature include:

- Middle-class tax cuts and property tax relief
- Investments in our students and workers
- Real welfare reform
- A more secure retirement for seniors

You can read more about our work in this update. I hope you find it helpful.

It's an honor to be your state representative. I always appreciate hearing your thoughts - from what we're doing right to what we're doing wrong to what we could be doing differently. Please don't hesitate to get in touch. Your voice helps me best represent you.

Sincerely,

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Working hard for Maine people

Budget: Putting Maine's middle class first

Maine families will see tax cuts, property tax relief and increased investment in students and workers under the balanced \$6.7 billion bipartisan budget passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto.

The biennial budget makes smart, targeted investments needed to grow Maine's economy, prioritizes middle-class tax cuts and rejects trickle-down economics. Highlights of the budget include:

Middle-class tax cuts

- Provide a \$135 million tax cut per year for 579,000 Maine families, with 75 percent of the benefit going to the bottom 90 percent of families
- Make the Earned Income Tax Credit refundable up to 5 percent
- Nearly double the standard deduction to \$11,600
- Eliminate the income tax on pensions for military families

Property tax relief

- Double the Homestead Exemption to \$20,000 for all Maine families
- Protect revenue sharing to support local services while keeping property taxes in check and provide \$62.5 million a year for these funds for local communities

Meaningful welfare reform

- Encourage work by fixing the welfare cliff, the sharp drop-off in benefits that occurs as recipients work more and their incomes increase; ensure that individuals in Maine illegally do not receive public benefits

Protection for vulnerable Mainers

- Increase funding by \$16.2 million to help clear waitlists for people with intellectual disabilities and brain injuries

Other laws passed by the Legislature:

Honoring veterans

- Eliminate the income tax on pensions for military families
- Strengthen veterans' services by identifying gaps, inefficiencies and ways to improve them
- Allow Vietnam veterans to receive an existing veterans' property tax exemption their counterparts from other conflicts are able to access
- Provide a gravestone for deceased veterans with no next of kin
- Honor the service of authentic veterans by making false claims of military service a crime

Making education work for young Mainers

- Increase investment in K-12 education by \$80 million and in the University of Maine and Maine Community College systems by \$28 million
- Make college more affordable by investing another \$10 million into the Maine State Grant scholarship program for students and workers
- Provide flexibility in college debt repayment for students and their families
- Make the funding formula fairer and more predictable for public charter schools and local school districts



Rep. Jorgensen chats with Joseph Donald Cyr of Lille at the annual Franco-American Day celebration.

Increasing public safety

- Create a cold case squad to investigate unsolved homicides
- Fight drug crime by increasing the number of drug enforcement agents, prosecutors and judges as well as creating a drug court in Penobscot County
- Crack down on methamphetamine lab operators and illegal uses of the opioid painkiller fentanyl
- Prevent the abuse of powdered alcohol by banning it in the state
- Strengthen stalking laws, increase protections for domestic violence victims in the workplace and in their homes

Protecting a clean environment, growing clean energy

- Restore funding for energy efficiency efforts to save consumers money and provide predictability to the business community
- Build a comprehensive solar policy so Mainers can reap the benefits of an abundant, clean energy source
- Streamline the approval process to allow the most promising community renewable energy projects to move forward
- Safeguard Maine waters from pollution and protect taxpayers from clean-up costs by defeating weak mining rules
- Protect Maine lakes and local economies by prohibiting the use of certain fertilizers near shorelines

Helping seniors age in dignity and security

- Address the shortage of affordable housing for Maine seniors with a \$15 million bond proposal for housing and weatherization efforts
- Protect the Drugs for the Elderly and Medicaid Savings programs that help low-income seniors pay for medicine and doctor's visits
- Help seniors live independently longer by boosting wages of in-home direct care workers and providing support to family caregivers of elderly Mainers
- Improve the quality of life of homebound seniors with expanded access to Meals on Wheels
- Protect older adults from financial exploitation through a personal finances management program
- Encourage the development of adult family care so seniors can age in place
- Increase funding for nursing homes by \$16 million to \$216 million

Boosting business and the economy

- Help workers learn new skills through expanded access to the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program
- Promote economic development by increasing companies' access to operating capital
- Develop Maine's broadband infrastructure by making grants and technical assistance available to communities
- Send voters an \$85 million bond proposal to invest in roads and bridges
- Put \$1 million into job training for workers



Rep. Jorgensen is interviewed by reporter about legislation affecting asylum seekers.



Rep. Jorgensen attends the Women, Work and Community's reception for legislators. (Photo credit: Amanda Kowalski Photography.)