

MUUSAN LEGISLATIVE ACTION SUMMARY

128th Legislature, First Regular Session

January-August 2017

The Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, upon study and recommendation by our Issue Groups, and in keeping with our UU Seven Principles, took positions on the following laws, bills and other actions including the biennial budget. We supported actions in line with our Principles and opposed those which were not. In all, MUUSAN took positions on 23 bills, resolves or other actions. Some of them are combined in this report.

This list is categorized by MUUSAN Issue Group: Democracy in Action, Health Care for All, Climate Change, Racial Justice

Actions that went our way are marked +. Those which did not are marked —.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

In November 2016, the people of Maine passed three MUUSAN-endorsed ballot initiatives which became law. In this legislature all three of the People's decisions met with resistance from Republican Party leadership in providing the support necessary to implement the laws.

MUUSAN SUPPORTED:

+ Question 2: K-12 Public School Funding – **PARTIAL SUCCESS**

Voters approved a provision to support K-12 public education by taxing a 3% surcharge on the portion of any household income exceeding \$200,000 per year. This law was blocked in the legislature in its voter-approved form. The biennial budget included about half the additional amount for public education which the ballot measure would have provided.

+ Question 4: Minimum Wage – **PARTIAL SUCCESS, but weakened by legislature**

Voters approved an increase in Maine's minimum wage from \$7.50 per hour to \$12 an hour by 2020. Then, the wage would increase according to inflation. Tipped employees' wages would reach the minimum wage by 2024. This law was blocked in its voter-approved form. Many bills were submitted, and MUUSAN opposed any bill that altered the will of the People as expressed in the final vote on Question 4.

— **LD 673, An Act To Restore the Tip Credit to Maine's Minimum Wage Law**, restored the state's tip credit that allowed employers to count employees' tips toward wages, as long as the tip credit does not exceed 50 percent of the minimum wage. Question 4 required the minimum wage for tipped workers to increase each year until it reached \$12 in 2024. With the tip credit restored, employers would be allowed to pay tipped workers \$6 per hour at minimum. **Both houses passed LD 673, which was signed into law.**

— **LD 1117, Resolve, To Establish the Commission To Study the Phase-Out of Subminimum Wage**. Left the People's decision intact but provided a two-year implementation period so that concerns which had been expressed could be monitored, studied and/or debunked. **Died between Houses June 16, 2017.**

+ Question 5: Ranked-Choice Voting — **SUCCESS**

Voters approved preferential voting for candidates for many State offices and for Congress. Ranked-Choice Voting received MUUSAN's highest endorsement. This law was initially blocked in its voter-approved form, but legislative attempts to repeal it failed. Portland Press Herald, June 28, 2017: "[Voter-Approved Ranked-Choice Voting Stays in Effect as Repeal Bills Fail.](#)"

— **LD 1232, An Act To Require the Secretary of State To Automatically Register Nonregistered Persons Who Are Qualified To Vote through Records of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles – DEAD**

Would have provided an update to Maine's voter registration process so that people can vote more easily and keep voter information more up-to-date. With this system, eligible citizens are automatically registered to vote, unless they decline, when they update their address with a state agency like the DMV. *Died between houses, June 1, 2017.*

? **LD 1566, An Act to Enact the Maine Fair Chance Employment Act. UNRESOLVED.** Carried over in the Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development. This bill would enact the Maine Fair Chance Employment Act and adds restrictions to the use of criminal history information in the context of employment decisions by private employers and the State and its political subdivisions and of licensing decisions by licensing agencies. It prohibits an employer from asking an applicant for employment to disclose information concerning the applicant's criminal history, or considering such information, until after the applicant has received a conditional offer of employment. *Sponsor Rep. Talbot-Ross requested that this bill be carried over into the second session of the 128th Legislature (starting Jan. 2018).*

MUUSAN OPPOSED:

+ **LD 121, An Act to Require Photographic Identification to Vote – DEAD**

This bill died in committee on April 27, 2017, but was replaced by a Governor-introduced bill, **LD 1627, An Act To Protect the Integrity of Maine Elections by Requiring Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting**, which was indefinitely postponed.

+ **LD 155, An Act to Protect Voting Integrity by Establishing a Residency Verification Requirement for Purposes of Voting – DEAD**

LD 155 requires the registrar of voters to verify residency when a voter registration application lists a residence address as a dormitory or domicile provided by, or located on the campus of, a postsecondary educational institution. The bill provides that certain requirements must be met to establish residency. *Died May 11, 2017.*

+ **LD 300, An Act to Preserve Funding for the Maine Clean Election Act by Removing Gubernatorial Candidates from Eligibility – DEAD**

Would have completely eliminated Maine Clean Election Act funding for gubernatorial candidates — and repealed this part of the program altogether. This bill raided funding designated to reform our electoral process by allowing candidates to run free from special interest money. It would have enhanced difficulties for grassroots candidates in 2018. *Died May 23, 2017.*

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

MUUSAN SUPPORTED:

— **LD 226, An Act to Protect and Improve the Health of Maine Citizens and the Economy of Maine – DEAD**

Would have authorized the State to accept federal funds (expand Medicaid) to provide health insurance coverage to low-income adults. *Died March 23, 2017.*

— **LD 1274, An Act To Promote Universal Health Care, Including Dental, Vision and Hearing Care – DEAD**

Would have created a single-payer health care system, financing primary and preventative health care services for most Maine residents, effective July 1, 2020. *Died in committee.*

? LD 1279, An Act To Ensure Patient Protections in the Health Insurance Laws – UNRESOLVED.

Allows children 26 years of age and younger to remain on their parents' health insurance policy. Carriers offering individual or group health plans may not establish lifetime or annual limits on the dollar value of benefits. Individual, group and blanket health plans may not impose a preexisting condition exclusion on any enrollee.

This bill is being held on the Special Appropriations Table because the legislature failed to reach agreement on funding it in the last budget, but it might be funded in the upcoming Second Session of the 128th Legislature.

— LD 1475, An Act To Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments in Families Today (the "LIFT" bill) — DEAD

Would have reduced child poverty in Maine by tackling several of the underlying factors that prevent low-income families with children from achieving sustainable economic independence. The bill contained help with housing and heating and increased access to higher education to raise parental earning power. It broke down barriers to work by removing obstacles to obtaining child care and transportation. All of this and more could have been accomplished using existing federal dollars through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. ***Died On Adjournment, Aug 2, 2017.***

MUUSAN OPPOSED:

+ LD 327, An Act to Allow Wrongful Death Cause of Action for the Death of a Viable Fetus – DEAD

This bill provided for a cause of action for the wrongful death of an unborn viable fetus (defined as a fetus that has reached 24 or more weeks of gestation), requiring that action must be brought in Probate Court. Like other fetal personhood bills around the country, this bill sought to establish a fetus as a separate and distinct person from the women who carries it, conveying legal status to a fetus, granting the fetus the legal rights to "heirs and an estate" and the right to sue under Maine's probate code.

— DHHS Section 1115 Waiver Application to Remove Healthcare Access for Thousands More Low-Income Mainers through Proposed Changes in MaineCare — WE DID NOT PREVAIL

On May 17-18, MUUSAN joined with its partners, the Maine Council of Churches, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and many other organizations and individuals in staunch opposition to this waiver application from the Department of Health and Human Services to the federal government. The waiver would allow DHHS to institute policies directly aimed at blocking access to MaineCare for many low-income Mainers who now have healthcare. MUUSAN participated in prayer vigils and testimony against this proposed action.

CLIMATE CHANGE

MUUSAN SUPPORTED:

— LD 1373, An Act to Expand Solar Power in Maine – DEAD

Would have prevented the Maine Public Utilities Commission from eliminating "net metering," Maine's only pro-solar policy; made easier the development of community solar farms; and re-established state rebate incentive for solar customers. ***Was tabled and died.***

? LD 1444, An Act Regarding Large-Scale Community Solar Procurement – Carried Over

Encourages large scale community solar farms and solar projects for large and small businesses, using a competitive process developed by the public advocate to reduce electricity rates over time. ***Sponsor Sen. Woodsome requested that this bill be carried over into the second session of the 128th Legislature (starting Jan. 2018).***

— **LD 1504, An Act Regarding Solar Power for Farms and Businesses – DEAD**

Would have removed the behind-the-meter tax (a fee charged for self-generated solar power that never touches the grid), lifted the arbitrary 10-person limit on community solar farms, and pushed “pause” on the phase-out of net metering while the PUC developed additional ratepayer analysis and alternatives to net metering. **Vetoed by the Governor; fell short of override by three votes on the legislature’s last day, August 2, 2017.** A heartbreaker for MUUSAN, as our Climate Change people worked especially hard on this bill.

RACIAL JUSTICE

MUUSAN SUPPORTED:

? **LD 1492, An Act to Attract, Educate and Retain New Mainers To Strengthen the Workforce – UNRESOLVED.**

Creates various programs to attract, educate and retain in the State's workforce immigrant populations by creating an Office of New Mainers, a Welcome Center initiative in adult ed. programs, and support for English language-acquisition instruction. ***This bill is being held on the Special Appropriations Table because the legislature failed to reach agreement on funding it in the last budget, but it might be funded in the upcoming Second Session of the 128th Legislature.***

MUUSAN OPPOSED:

+ **LD 366, An Act To Ensure Compliance with Federal Immigration Law by State and Local Government Entities – DEAD**

Would have forced local law enforcement to act like federal immigration agents, and punished towns and cities that chose not to do so by withholding all state funds. Like other “anti-sanctuary city” bills around the country, it would have made immigrants feel less welcome in Maine and undermined trust between local law enforcement and the communities they serve. ***Died June 13, 2017 after defeats in both houses.***