

Legislative Report for MAT
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Municipalities will see a \$41 million revenue sharing cut, state workers have been asked to take furlough days and around 80 state troopers will be laid off as part of the Governor's budget cutting Executive Order. The E.O. includes up to \$300 million in budget cuts. Faced with a \$1.3 billion hole in this year's budget, many state departments are being asked to take 4% cuts going into their last five months of the fiscal year. Hospitals will see 4 percent less for the Medicaid patients they take in, state employee layoffs are possible and the community mental health boards and coordinating agencies are bracing for a \$12.5 million cut.

One of the biggest cuts being made is the slice to revenue sharing. The strings attached to the federal stimulus money steers the budget cutting knife away from education and universities, so the axe has to fall somewhere. Also on the chopping block are 81 state troopers who just graduated from the trooper school. Many legislators are actively working to keep the state troopers from being cut. The budget debate continues to be at the top of the legislative agenda. Controversy continues over the DNR budget as it travels through the House budget process. Language to require the DNR to prepare 63,000 acres for prescribed treatment (cord mandate language) was added to the bill during sub committee debate. Language to change the "no bid" process continues to be a point of difference between forestry groups.

Legislation to move forestry programs to the Department of Agriculture has been spearheaded by Senator Jerry VanWoerkom, R-Muskegon. Senator VanWoerkon is Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Bioeconomy Committee. Chair VanWoerkom commented that moving the forestry programs from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Agriculture would make operations more efficient. MDA already plays a large role with forestry programs and it has a strong track record of managing state resources wisely, said VanWoerkom.

Senate Bill 559, sponsored by Senator Tony Stamas, R-Midland would transfer the Qualified Forest Property Program from the Department of Natural Resources to the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Senate Bill 600, sponsored by Senator Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac would Transfer the Qualified Forest Property Recapture Tax Act from the Department of DNR to the MDA. Senate Bill 601, sponsored by Senator Cameron Brown, R-Sturgis would transfer jurisdiction of state forests from the DNR to the MDA. Senate Bill 602, sponsored by Senator Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland would transfer the Right to Forest Act from the DNR to the MDA. Senate Bill 603 sponsored by Senator Gerald VanWoerkom would transfer forestry programs from the DNR to the MDA. All the bills were referred to the Senate Agriculture and Bioeconomy Committee.

House Bill 4224, (sponsor Rep. Kate Ebli, D-Monroe) legislation to allow a slasher unit to legally be hauled down the road, has passed the House and Senate and is awaiting signature by Governor Jennifer Granholm. The bill has had quite a "political" history. Last session a similar bill traveled through the legislative process only to be left hanging on the Senate calendar the final day of session. I immediately requested sponsor Rep. Kate Ebli, D-Monroe to submit a new bill request to be introduced early in the 2009 session. House Bill 4224 was introduced in January, reported out of the House Transportation Committee and moved to the Senate Transportation Committee in February where we hit a "snag." Because of "politics," the bill was put on the back burner. A new plan of action was developed and implemented. Representative Ebli cut through the politics and got the bill set for debate. We were successful with our effort because Rep. Ebli did not give up on the issue and put policy before politics.