

Regional Voices - From Sebago Lake to Casco Bay

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We've got two things to talk about this week: The Governor's state budget and the beginning of significant public hearings at the State House.

First the budget. Governor Mills submitted her first two-year state budget to lawmakers in a special State House speech this past Monday. Read the text of her speech [here](#), and coverage from the PPH [here](#). If you're into the details, the full budget document is available [here](#).

Medicaid expansion and increased funding for fighting the opioid crisis made headlines. For GPCOG members, the budget offered progress on several fronts by proposing more funding for K-12 schools, municipal revenue sharing, and County operations.

Although the Governor's budget doesn't restore revenue sharing to 5%, or completely fund 55% of K-12 education, it moves toward those goals in meaningful ways and significantly reduces pressure on the property tax.

The budget does not contain any tax increases, but it does fully expend all the revenues projected to come to the state in the next two years.

Deeper inside the budget there are new initiatives, including an increase in minimum teacher salaries, the establishment of a new Office of Outdoor Recreation, and enhancements to the implementation of the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code.

Public hearings will be coming up soon on the Governor's budget. It's not too early to reach out to your local legislators and let them know what you think about Governor Mills' spending plan for the next two years.

Speaking of reaching out to lawmakers (it's easy – just [click here](#) to find them and their contact information) – here are some upcoming public hearings at the State House on issues that you've identified to us as your priorities. You may want to make your voice heard on:

Broadband expansion: On 2/19 at 1 p.m. the [Appropriations Committee](#) will hear testimony on three bills that fund broadband expansion in Maine. [LD 295](#) (\$100 million bond for rural areas), [LD 354](#) (\$20 million bond for underserved areas), and [LD 172](#) (\$15 million bond for smart cities).

Comp Plans: The [State and Local Government Committee](#) will hear testimony on two bills to improve comprehensive planning. On 2/25 at 9 a.m. [LD 310](#) suggests including seniors and aging in place in comprehensive plans; on 2/27 at 9 a.m. [LD 563](#) proposes adding sea level rise as a component of comprehensive plans.

Coastal resiliency. Finally on 3/1 at 10 a.m. the [Environment and Natural Resources Committee](#) will take testimony on [LD 565](#) which seeks to establish the Maine Coastal Risks and Hazards Commission. The Commission would recommend actions to prepare for increased storm surges, extreme weather events, projected sea level rise, increased river flooding and storm water runoff.

If these issues are important to you, speak out. And if you ever need help connecting with lawmakers (or figuring out who to talk to), just [let me know](#).