

Quarterly Issues List for WZLO  
January 1st through March 31st, 2023

The following report identifies this quarter's issues as:

- ARPA FUNDING
  - Counties and Municipalities across the country have been distributing federal funding via the American Rescue Plan Act. Here in Maine we've kept listeners informed about the programs and organizations these pandemic-related funds are being used for.
  
- PFAs
  - The prevalence of forever chemicals in Maine has been a top-of-mind issue for our audience. We've reported this quarter on clean-up efforts as well as a lawsuit Maine's Attorney General has filed against the companies that manufacture the toxic materials.
  
- ENERGY COSTS
  - This Winter has been particularly costly for Mainers to heat their homes. We've reported on efforts to help alleviate that strain as well as recent proposals from CMP and Versant to raise rates on customers.
  
- BUDGET BATTLE
  - A controversial move by Maine Democrats has pushed through the State's latest biennial budget to the tune of nearly \$10 billion. We reported this quarter on the negotiations and talks that lead up to it's passing in late March.
  
- HOMELESSNESS
  - The city of Bangor continues to contend with a growing homelessness crisis. We've reported on what officials have done to address the issue, including lawmakers and local non-profits.

**WZLO, Bangor, ME**, airs local newscasts **Monday-Friday at the top of every hour between 6am and 8am. Afternoon newscasts are aired at 12pm.** The following news scripts are aired on the following dates, but **the times they're read are at the total discretion of the anchor.** This listing is by no means exhaustive, and the order in which the issues appear does not reflect any priority or significance.

THE MAINE LEGISLATURE HAS APPROVED A NEARLY \$10 BILLION, TWO-YEAR STATE BUDGET THAT PREVENTS ANY THREAT OF A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN. OVER G-O-P OBJECTIONS, DEMOCRATS PUSHED THROUGH THE BUDGET THURSDAY NIGHT WITH SIMPLE MAJORITY APPROVAL ON PARTY LINE VOTES AFTER NEGOTIATIONS WITH REPUBLICANS BROKE DOWN. THE APPROVAL ENSURES THE BUDGET GOES INTO EFFECT BEFORE JULY 1ST, THE START OF THE NEW FISCAL YEAR, WITHOUT A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY. DEMOCRATS SAY THE TACTIC PRESERVES REPUBLICANS' NEGOTIATING CLOUT FOR ADDITIONAL SPENDING PROPOSALS TO BE CONSIDERED LATER, BUT THAT HAS NOT ASSUAGED GROWING RESENTMENT FROM REPUBLICANS WHO SAY THEY WERE CUT OUT OF THE PROCESS.

MAINE'S ATTORNEY GENERAL IS SUING THE MANUFACTURERS OF PFAS, CONTENDING THEY KNEW ABOUT THE TOXICITY OF THE SO-CALLED "FOREVER CHEMICALS" DECADES AGO BUT CONCEALED THE INFORMATION FROM THE PUBLIC. THE LAWSUITS, WHICH TARGET DUPONT, 3M, AND OTHERS, SEEKS TO RECOVER ALL COSTS TO INVESTIGATE, MITIGATE, AND MONITOR CONTAMINATION. ATTORNEY GENERAL AARON FREY SAID THE DEFENDANTS "WILLFULLY INTRODUCED TOXIC CHEMICALS" INTO MAINE'S ENVIRONMENT. ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICIALS HAVE DETECTED HIGH LEVELS OF PFAS IN BODIES OF WATER, WELLS, AND EVEN IN SOME WILDLIFE LIKE DEER. A DUPONT SPOKESPERSON SAID THE COMPANY DOESN'T COMMENT ON LITIGATION BUT BELIEVES "THESE COMPLAINTS ARE WITHOUT MERIT." 3M SAID IT ACTED RESPONSIBLY AND INTENDS TO "VIGOROUSLY DEFEND ITS RECORD OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP."

PENQUIS IN BANGOR IS PURCHASING A LOCAL MOTEL TO TURN IT INTO PERMANENT HOUSING FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. ACCORDING TO NEWS CENTER MAINE, THE ORGANIZATION IS HOPING TO PURCHASE AND RENOVATE THE PINE TREE INN ON CLEVELAND STREET, CREATING 41 UNITS FOR PEOPLE IN NEED. OFFICIALS SAY THE FACILITY WILL ALLOW THEM TO PUT A ROOF OVER THE HEADS OF UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS WHILE HELPING THEM GET ACCESS TO PERMANENT SUPPORT SERVICES. PENQUIS WILL BE FINALIZING THE PURCHASE OF THE PINE TREE INN DURING THE THIRD WEEK OF APRIL AND RENOVATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE THREE TO FIVE MONTHS.

DOZENS OF VERSANT POWER CUSTOMERS HAVE VOICED THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT A PROPOSED DISTRIBUTION RATE INCREASE. THE MAINE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION HELD A PUBLIC HEARING TUESDAY NIGHT IN BANGOR. ACCORDING TO TV5, BACK IN OCTOBER, VERSANT POWER PETITIONED THE COMMISSION FOR THE INCREASE, CITING THE NEED FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS, INCLUDING SMART METER UPGRADES AND TREE MANAGEMENT. DEPENDING ON AVERAGE ELECTRICITY USAGE, RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS COULD SEE THEIR BILL INCREASE AS HIGH AS \$24 A MONTH. CUSTOMERS SAY THE RATES THEY PAY ARE ALREADY TOO HIGH. IF APPROVED, THE RATE INCREASE WOULD GO INTO EFFECT IN JULY. YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION ONLINE AT "MAINE (DOT) GOV (SLASH) M-P-U-C".

MAJORITY DEMOCRATS IN THE MAINE LEGISLATURE ARE PUSHING THROUGH A "BASELINE BUDGET" TO ENSURE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS CONTINUE IN THE NEW FISCAL YEAR WHILE LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN TO DISCUSSIONS ON NEW SPENDING INITIATIVES LATER. THE PARED-DOWN BUDGET MUST BE ADOPTED BY THE END OF THIS WEEK FOR A SIMPLE MAJORITY-APPROVED BILL TO GO INTO EFFECT ON JULY 1ST. THE PROPOSAL EMERGED THURSDAY AFTER CLOSED-DOOR NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES AND GOVERNOR JANET MILLS OVER HER PROPOSED \$10.3 BILLION, TWO-YEAR BUDGET. IT PREVENTS REPUBLICANS FROM USING A STATE GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN AS A NEGOTIATING TACTIC BUT PRESERVES THEIR NEGOTIATING CLOUT FOR PROPOSALS TO BE CONSIDERED LATER.

MAINE'S CHIEF JUSTICE SAYS THE STATE'S BACKLOG OF CRIMINAL COURT CASES REMAINS 60% TO 65% HIGHER THAN PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS. CHIEF JUSTICE VALERIE STANFILL TOLD LAWMAKERS THURSDAY THAT THE PRIMARY CAUSE STEMS FROM THE INABILITY TO HOLD JURY TRIALS EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC, BUT OTHER CAUSES INCLUDE A BIG INCREASE IN FELONY CRIMES, THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC, AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS. STANFILL USED HER STATE OF THE JUDICIARY ADDRESS TO A JOINT SESSION OF THE MAINE LEGISLATURE TO PROMOTE THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSAL THAT INCLUDES FOUR NEW JUDGES AND MORE CLERKS AND MARSHALS. SHE ALSO WANTS A PAY RAISE FOR JUDGES.

THE CITY OF PORTLAND HAS OPENED ITS NEW HOMELESS SHELTER, SHIFTING HOMELESS SERVICES AWAY FROM DOWNTOWN. THE GRAND OPENING OF THE 218-BED FACILITY COMES AS THE CITY GRAPPLES WITH HUNDREDS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS WHO HAVE ARRIVED IN THE NEW YEAR AND ARE VYING FOR BEDS WITH OTHERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. THE FIRST GUESTS WHO ARRIVE NEXT WEEK WILL GET TO SLEEP ON BEDS, UNLIKE MATS ON THE FLOOR AT THE CURRENT EMERGENCY SHELTER. THE NEW SHELTER WILL PROVIDE MEALS AND HEALTHCARE, AS WELL AS PSYCHIATRIC AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAMS.

LIHEAP

3/16

PA

MAINE HAS RECEIVED AN ADDITIONAL \$5 MILLION FOR THE LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. ACCORDING TO TV5, SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS AND CONGRESSMAN JARED GOLDEN SECURED THE MONEY IN THE 2023 GOVERNMENT FUNDING BILL. MAINE HAS RECEIVED NEARLY \$54 MILLION THIS WINTER THROUGH LIHEAP, WHICH IS FEDERALLY FUNDED BASED ON INCOME, FAMILY SIZE AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES.

A JUDGE HAS DECIDED NOT TO THROW OUT A BALLOT PROPOSAL AIMED AT THWARTING A PUBLIC BUYOUT OF MAINE'S TWO INVESTOR-OWNED ELECTRIC UTILITIES. ACCORDING TO THE KENNEBEC JOURNAL, THE BUYOUT PROPOSAL, WHICH WILL APPEAR ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT, WOULD REPLACE CENTRAL MAINE POWER AND VERSANT POWER WITH A CONSUMER-OWNED UTILITY. BUT LAST FALL, OPPONENTS MOUNTED THEIR OWN REFERENDUM DRIVE TO REQUIRE VOTER APPROVAL OF ANY STATE BORROWING OVER \$1 BILLION. THE PAPER SAYS THAT MEASURE COULD DERAIL THE CREATION OF "PINE TREE POWER", AS A BUY OUT OF THE TWO CURRENT UTILITIES IS ESTIMATED TO BE AROUND \$13.5 BILLION. A LAWSUIT, ALLEGING THAT MAINE'S SECRETARY OF STATE INCORRECTLY CERTIFIED NEARLY 1,200 PETITION SIGNATURES IN SUPPORT OF THE BORROWING-OVERSIGHT MEASURE, WAS REJECTED BY A SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE ON TUESDAY. JUSTICE MICHAELA MURPHY RULED THAT THE LAWSUIT'S BACKERS FAILED TO PROVE THE SIGNATURES HAD BEEN COLLECTED IMPROPERLY.

MAINE FIREFIGHTERS ARE PART OF A LARGER EFFORT TO SEE PFAS REMOVED FROM THEIR FIRE PROTECTION GEAR. TODAY THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS IS SCHEDULED TO ADDRESS THE NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION REGARDING THE FOREVER CHEMICALS. EXPOSURE TO PFAS HAS BEEN LINKED TO CANCER WHICH IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF FIREFIGHTER DEATH. TODAY THE I-A-F-F WILL BE MEETING IN NORTH CAROLINA TO PUSH FOR REGULATIONS TO REPLACE GEAR CONTAINING CARCINOGENS AND TOXINS WITH PFAS-FREE ALTERNATIVES.

NEARLY 400 MAINE HOUSEHOLDS WERE AFFECTED BY A SOFTWARE GLITCH ON THURSDAY THAT RESULTED IN HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS IN HEATING ASSISTANCE FUNDS BEING WITHDRAWN FROM INDIVIDUAL'S BANK ACCOUNTS. TV5 REPORTS THE MONEY WAS FROM THE FEDERAL HEATING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. THE MAINE HOUSING AUTHORITY SAYS THE PAYMENTS ARE BEING REISSUED AND WILL BE SENT OUT AGAIN TODAY. OFFICIALS SAY IT IS NOT A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM AND THE GLITCH HAS BEEN CORRECTED.

MORE THAN HALF OF THE \$450 HEATING RELIEF CHECKS FROM THE GOVERNOR HAVE BEEN MAILED OUT. THE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES SAYS AS OF TUESDAY, 57% OF THE CHECKS HAVE BEEN MAILED. THE RELIEF PAYMENTS CAME AS PART OF GOVERNOR JANET MILLS' EMERGENCY ENERGY RELIEF PLAN TO HELP WITH HIGH ENERGY COSTS. ABOUT 880,000 MAINERS QUALIFY FOR THE CHECKS. FOR THOSE WHO HAVEN'T RECEIVED THEIR CHECK YET, THE STATE SAYS MOST SHOULD EXPECT TO GET IT BY THE END OF MARCH.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS TOUTED BIPARTISANSHIP WHILE SIGNING THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET INTO LAW ON TUESDAY. MILLS SAYS THE ADJUSTMENTS TO THE CURRENT BUDGET, THAT RUNS THROUGH THE END OF JUNE, WILL HELP NURSING FACILITIES, HOSPITALS, AND SMALL BUSINESSES. THE MAINE LEGISLATURE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVED THE ROUGHLY \$40 MILLION IN BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS TO ACCOUNT FOR SOME SURPLUS REVENUE. MILLS THANKED THE LEGISLATURE FOR THE BIPARTISAN SUPPORT AND SAID SHE HOPES THAT SPIRIT CONTINUES AS WORK PROGRESSES ON A \$10.3 BILLION TWO-YEAR BUDGET.

PENOBSCOT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS DISTRIBUTED ANOTHER NEARLY \$350 THOUSAND IN ARPA FUNDS TUESDAY MORNING. ACCORDING TO TV5, REPRESENTATIVES FROM 13 GROUPS WERE ON HAND TO ACCEPT CHECKS IN AMOUNTS RANGING FROM \$5,000 TO NEARLY \$50,000. THE TOWN OF CHARLESTON RECEIVED \$49,700, THIS ROUND OF FUNDING'S LARGEST CHECK . IT'S EARMARKED FOR THE FIRE DEPARTMENT TO REPLACE ITS ANTIQUATED AIR PACKS. TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A COMMISSIONER'S FUND AWARD, EACH ORGANIZATION HAD TO SHOW HOW THEY WERE IMPACTED BY COVID-19.

BUDGET

2/17

PA

THE MAINE LEGISLATURE HAS APPROVED THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET FOLLOWING SEVERAL WEEKS OF HEARINGS. IT NOW HEADS TO THE GOVERNOR'S DESK FOR HER SIGNATURE. TV5 REPORTS THE BUDGET PASSED IN THE HOUSE BY A VOTE OF 113 TO 21 AND A 24 TO 5 VOTE IN THE SENATE. THE PROPOSAL, WHICH RECEIVED THE UNANIMOUS SUPPORT OF THE APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, ENSURES THE STATE WILL MEET ALL OF ITS FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS. THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET CONTAINS NO NEW PROGRAMS BUT INCLUDES FUNDING FOR A VARIETY OF NEEDS; INCLUDING PFAS TESTING, HOSPITALS AND NURSING FACILITIES, MAINE TURNPIKE TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT, AND THE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE.

A MAINE LAWMAKER HAS PROPOSED A BILL TO REQUIRE THE STATE TO OFFER TO BUY OUT FARMERS WHOSE LAND WAS CONTAMINATED BY PFAS CAUSED BY THE SPREADING OF SLUDGE. PFAS ARE SOMETIMES CALLED "FOREVER CHEMICALS" BECAUSE OF HOW LONG THEY PERSIST IN THE ENVIRONMENT. REPUBLICAN REPRESENTATIVE WAYNE PARRY'S BILL WOULD REQUIRE THE STATE TO VALUE THE LAND AS IF IT WEREN'T CONTAMINATED AND SETS A MINIMUM PRICE OF \$20,000 PER ACRE.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS SAYS THE STATE'S FISCAL HEALTH IS SOLID ENOUGH FOR "WHATEVER ECONOMIC CHALLENGES MAY COME." SHE ADDRESSED LAWMAKERS TUESDAY NIGHT FOR HER FORMAL BUDGET ADDRESS IN WHICH SHE TOUTED HER \$10.3 BILLION, TWO-YEAR BUDGET PROPOSAL AS "STRONG" AND "BALANCED" WITHOUT RAISING TAXES. THE BUDGET REPRESENTS A 10% INCREASE OVER THE PREVIOUS BUDGET, AND REPUBLICANS SAID THE GOVERNOR IS TRYING TO SPEND TOO MUCH. BUT MILLS SAID IT'S STILL WITHIN PROJECTIONS OF THE REVENUE FORECASTING COMMITTEE AND LEAVES MAINE'S RAINY DAY FUND UNTOUCHED AT A RECORD HIGH OF MORE THAN \$900 MILLION.

THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY ANNOUNCED MONDAY THAT IT WILL USE \$19 MILLION FROM THE BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW TO ADDRESS PFAS IN DRINKING WATER IN MAINE. THE TOXIC “FOREVER CHEMICALS”, WHICH DO NOT BREAK DOWN NATURALLY OVER TIME, HAVE BEEN LINKED TO CANCER AND OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS. ACCORDING TO THE KENNEBEC JOURNAL, THE INVESTMENT WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITIES AS GRANTS TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO SAFE AND CLEAN WATER IN SMALL, RURAL AND DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES WHILE SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIES. THE GRANT PROGRAM WAS PRAISED BY SENATORS SUSAN COLLINS AND ANGUS KING, AS WELL AS GOVERNOR JANET MILLS.

THE MAINE LEGISLATURE'S SPENDING COMMITTEE REACHED A UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT ON A SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET THAT FUNDS OPERATIONS THROUGH THE END OF JUNE, RAISING HOPES THAT THE BIPARTISAN SPIRIT WILL CONTINUE AS LAWMAKERS TACKLE THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED \$10.3 BILLION BUDGET. SENATOR PEGGY ROTUNDO, CO-CHAIR OF APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, PRAISED MEMBERS OF BOTH PARTIES FOR WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET PROPOSAL. IT CONTAINS NO NEW PROGRAMS BUT INCLUDES FUNDING FOR A VARIETY OF NEEDS INCLUDING TESTING FOR PFAS, HOSPITALS AND NURSING FACILITIES, AND SUPPORT FOR MAINE TURNPIKE TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT AND THE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE.

HERMON HIGH SCHOOL WILL BE USING BOTTLED WATER UNTIL AT LEAST THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR DUE TO HIGH LEVELS OF PFAS IN THE SCHOOL'S WELL. ACCORDING TO TV5, THE WATER TESTED ABOVE THE STATE LIMIT OF NO MORE THAN 20 PARTS PER TRILLION.

HERMON SUPERINTENDENT MICAH GRANT SAYS THE RESULTS FROM THE FIRST ROUND OF TESTING WERE SLIGHTLY BELOW THE THRESHOLD. BUT IN MID-JANUARY, THE SCHOOL RECEIVED THE RESULTS OF A SECOND TEST, DONE IN DECEMBER, THAT CAME IN OVER THE LIMIT. AN EMAIL WENT OUT TUESDAY NOTIFYING PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND STAFF OF THE PROBLEM. OFFICIALS SAY BOTTLED WATER DRINKING STATIONS HAVE BEEN SET UP IN THE SCHOOL, AND EVERYONE AT THE SCHOOL IS ENCOURAGED TO USE REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES FOR THE TIME BEING.

A FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TEAM IS TAKING A “DISASTER RELIEF APPROACH” TO BANGOR’S HOMELESSNESS CRISIS. ACCORDING TO THE BANGOR DAILY NEWS, THE “TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM”, FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, HAS BEEN WORKING WITH CITY OFFICIALS SINCE LATE LAST YEAR. THE TEAM IS ESSENTIALLY A DISASTER RELIEF GROUP THAT HAS WORKED TO RAPIDLY REHOUSE UNSHELTERED PEOPLE IN LARGER METROPOLITAN AREAS. THE B-D-N REPORTS THE TEAM’S EFFORTS MIRROR THOSE THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY WOULD DEPLOY IN THE WAKE OF NATURAL DISASTERS.

MANY ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE REGION ARE WORKING TO KEEP PEOPLE SAFE AND WARM TODAY AND TOMORROW DURING THE SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES. ACCORDING TO THE MAINE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, HERE IN BANGOR, WARMING CENTERS INCLUDE THE TOGETHER PLACE ON 2ND STREET, THE BRICK CHURCH ON UNION STREET, THE BANGOR AREA HOMELESS SHELTER ON MAIN STREET, THE MANSION CHURCH ON CENTER STREET, THE RIVER CHURCH ON CENTER STREET, AND THE BANGOR PUBLIC LIBRARY ON HARLOW STREET. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE WARMING CENTERS, INCLUDING HOURS OF OPERATION, VISIT "MAINE (DOT) GOV (SLASH) MEMA". CLICK ON "RESPONSE AND RECOVERY" AND THEN "MASS CARE".

A LOCAL ORGANIZATION IS WORKING TO MAKE SURE SOME OF THE AREA'S MOST VULNERABLE RESIDENTS WILL BE SAFE DURING THE IMPENDING SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES. ACCORDING TO TV5, NEEDLEPOINT SANCTUARY OF MAINE HAS BEEN WORKING WITH THE UNHOUSED POPULATION IN BANGOR AND BEYOND SINCE 2018. VOLUNTEERS ARE WORKING WITH THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF BANGOR TO OPEN A WARMING CENTER AT THE PARK STREET CHURCH. THEY ALSO LAUNCHED A GOFUNDME. AFTER EASILY REACHING THEIR FIRST GOAL OF \$5,000, THEY ARE NOW AIMING TO RAISE \$10,000. OFFICIALS SAY THE MONEY WILL BE USED TO BUY BOTH SUPPLIES FOR THE WARMING CENTER AND HOTEL ROOMS FOR ADDITIONAL SHELTER.

MAINE IS DEVELOPING A BROAD RANGE OF SAFETY STANDARDS INTENDED TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC FOOD SYSTEM FROM PFAS. THE TOXIC “FOREVER CHEMICALS” DO NOT BREAK DOWN NATURALLY OVER TIME AND HAVE BEEN LINKED TO CANCER AND OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS. ACCORDING TO THE KENNEBEC JOURNAL, MAINE ALREADY HAS SAFETY LIMITS FOR MILK AND BEEF, BUT ITS HUNT FOR TAINTED WELLS AND FIELDS AT MORE THAN 1,000 AGRICULTURAL SITES HAS STATE TOXICOLOGISTS SCRAMBLING TO SET FOOD SAFETY LIMITS FOR OTHER LOCAL CROPS AND LIVESTOCK. ONCE ESTABLISHED, MAINE WILL LIKELY USE THE FOOD STANDARDS TO DETERMINE WHEN LOCAL FARMERS, TRYING TO RECOVER FROM A PFAS CRISIS, CAN SAFELY RETURN TO THE MARKET.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS PLANS TO ADDRESS A JOINT SESSION OF THE MAINE LEGISLATURE ON VALENTINE'S DAY. THE GOVERNOR WILL HIGHLIGHT HER BUDGET PROPOSAL AND OUTLINE ACTIONS SHE IS TAKING TO STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMY. INTRODUCED EARLIER THIS MONTH, MILLS' PROPOSED BUDGET, WHICH IS UNDERGOING LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY, DOES NOT RAISE TAXES, AND LEAVES THE RAINY DAY FUND UNTOUCHED AT MORE THAN \$900 MILLION. THE GOVERNOR WAS INVITED TO DELIVER HER ADDRESS ON FEBRUARY 14TH BY THE LEGISLATURE'S PRESIDING OFFICERS, SENATE PRESIDENT TROY JACKSON AND HOUSE SPEAKER RACHEL TALBOT ROSS,.

THE STATE OF MAINE IS MAKING IT EASY TO CHECK THE STATUS OF YOUR \$450 HEATING ASSISTANCE CHECK. THE MILLS ADMINISTRATION SAYS THE FIRST ROUND CHECKS ARE NOW IN THE MAIL AND SHOULD ARRIVE LATER THIS WEEK. TO FIND OUT WHERE YOUR CHECK IS IN THE PROCESS, VISIT "PORTAL (DOT) MAINE (DOT) GOV (SLASH) REFUND STATUS". ACCORDING TO THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES, AN ESTIMATED 880,000 MAINERS QUALIFY FOR THE ONE-TIME PAYMENT. ALL CHECKS ARE EXPECTED TO BE MAILED BY THE END OF MARCH.

MAINE IS MAILING THE FIRST OF ITS ENERGY COST RELIEF PAYMENTS TO RESIDENTS DURING A WEEK WHEN TEMPERATURES ARE EXPECTED TO PLUMMET AS LOW AS NEGATIVE 20 DEGREES. THE MAINE LEGISLATURE APPROVED \$450 RELIEF CHECKS FOR RESIDENTS TO HELP WITH THE SURGING COST OF WINTER HEATING. GOVERNOR JANET MILLS, WHO PROPOSED THE CHECKS, SAYS THE FIRST 5,000 PAYMENTS WENT OUT ON MONDAY, AND 200,000 WILL BE MAILED PER WEEK AFTER THAT. MILLS SAYS MOST MAINERS WILL RECEIVE THE CHECKS BY THE END OF MARCH. TEMPERATURES ARE EXPECTED TO FALL TO POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS LEVELS OF COLD BY THE END OF THE WEEK.

A PROPOSAL, BACKED BY THE PARENT COMPANY OF CENTRAL MAINE POWER, THAT AIMS TO PREVENT THE CREATION OF A CONSUMER-OWNED UTILITY IN MAINE HAS ENOUGH SIGNATURES TO APPEAR ON THE BALLOT. MAINE SECRETARY OF STATE SHENNA BELLOWS CONFIRMED ON THURSDAY THAT THE SIGNATURE THRESHOLD HAD BEEN MET. THE “NO BLANK CHECKS” INITIATIVE WOULD FORCE THE STATE TO RECEIVE VOTER APPROVAL BEFORE TAKING ON MORE THAN \$1 BILLION IN DEBT THROUGH REVENUE BONDS. THE PROPOSAL IS A DIRECT RESPONSE TO THE REFERENDUM SPEARHEADED BY A GROUP CALLED “OUR POWER MAINE” THAT WOULD FORCE C-M-P AND VERSANT POWER TO SELL THEIR ASSETS TO A NEW CONSUMER-OWNED UTILITY.

REPUBLICANS IN MAINE SAY THEY WILL PROPOSE A HOST OF LEGAL CHANGES TO TRY TO CAP THE SURGING COST OF HOME HEATING IN THE STATE. MAINE IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON FUEL OIL, THE COST OF WHICH HAS DOUBLED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. THE GROUP OF G-O-P SENATORS SAID THEY WILL PROPOSE REFORMS TO THE MAINE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF ACTS TO TRY TO EXPAND OPTIONS FOR HOME ENERGY CREATION. TUESDAY'S ANNOUNCEMENT COMES ROUGHLY THREE WEEKS AFTER THE MAINE LEGISLATURE SIGNED OFF ON \$450 RELIEF CHECKS TO HELP RESIDENTS WITH WINTER HEATING COSTS.

THE FIRST ROUND OF \$450 HEATING RELIEF CHECKS ARE GOING OUT TO ELIGIBLE MAINERS THIS WEEK. ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES, THE GOAL IS TO MAIL OUT 200,000 CHECKS PER WEEK UNTIL ALL OF THE PAYMENTS ARE PROCESSED. THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMISSIONER, KIRSTEN FIGUEROA, APPEARED IN FRONT OF LAWMAKERS IN AUGUSTA ON TUESDAY. SHE SAYS THEY HOPE TO GET ALL OF THE PAYMENTS OUT BEFORE THE END OF MARCH. MORE THAN 870,000 MAINERS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THE HEATING RELIEF CHECKS.

MAINE LAWMAKERS ARE EYEING SEVERAL POSSIBLE CHANGES TO GENERAL ASSISTANCE AS HOMELESSNESS AND A HOUSING CRUNCH HAVE STRAINED THE STATE PROGRAM AND ITS ABILITY TO SERVE FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS IN NEED. ACCORDING TO THE KENNEBEC JOURNAL, MORE THAN A DOZEN BILLS RELATED TO GENERAL ASSISTANCE HAVE BEEN PROPOSED SO FAR THIS SESSION. THOUGH THE FINAL LANGUAGE FOR MOST HAS YET TO BE SUBMITTED, SOME PROPOSALS TARGET THE STATE'S REIMBURSEMENT RATE, WHILE OTHERS FOCUS ON ELIGIBILITY CHECKS AND WORK REQUIREMENTS. THE GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HAS SEEN INCREASED DEMAND IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, IN LARGE PART DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

PENOBSCOT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HAVE ISSUED A STATEMENT ON A RECENT REQUEST, BY THE A-C-L-U, FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF ARPA FUNDS FOR REPAIRS AT THE PENOBSCOT COUNTY JAIL. THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION WANTS JAILS AND PRISONS IN SEVERAL STATES INVESTIGATED FOR WHAT THEY SAY IS THE MISUSE OF COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS. THE A-C-L-U OF MAINE SAYS THE COMMISSION IMPROPERLY SET NEARLY \$1.2 MILLION ASIDE FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS AT THE JAIL. IN A RELEASE ON FRIDAY, THE PENOBSCOT COUNTY COMMISSION SAID IT DID DIRECT A PORTION OF THE FUNDING FOR REPAIRS TO THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY. HOWEVER, THE COMMISSION SAYS THE FUNDS WERE ALLOCATED FROM THE PORTION OF ARPA FUNDING THAT WAS RELEASED UNDER REVISED TREASURY RULES FOR COUNTY GOVERNMENT CAPITAL EXPENDITURES.

THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION WANTS JAILS AND PRISONS IN SEVERAL STATES INVESTIGATED FOR ALLEGEDLY MISUSING COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS. ACCORDING TO TV5, THAT INCLUDES THE PENOBSCOT COUNTY JAIL IN BANGOR. IN A RELEASE ON THURSDAY, THE A-C-L-U OF MAINE SAID THEY'VE JOINED OTHER A-C-L-U AFFILIATES AROUND THE COUNTRY IN A LETTER TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY, SEEKING AN INVESTIGATION. THEY SAY THE ARPA FUNDS WERE INTENDED TO SUPPORT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN RESPONDING TO THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THEIR COMMUNITIES BUT PENOBSCOT COUNTY JAIL IMPROPERLY SET NEARLY \$1.2 MILLION ASIDE FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS AT THE FACILITY. TV5 HAS REACHED OUT TO THE PENOBSCOT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, BUT THEY'RE NOT COMMENTING AT THIS TIME.

THE CITY OF BANGOR HAS ISSUED ITS FIRST DRAFT ALLOCATIONS FOR NEARLY \$21 MILLION IN FUNDING FROM THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT. ACCORDING TO TV5, THESE TOTALS ARE SUGGESTED AND DO NOT REFLECT ANY OFFICIAL DECISIONS. THE LARGEST SUM, NEARLY 39 PERCENT OF THE FUNDING, WOULD GO TOWARD DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING \$5 MILLION FOR HOUSING, AND THE REST FOR HOMELESSNESS AND CHILDCARE. \$3 MILLION WOULD AID PUBLIC HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PREVENTION, TREATMENT, AND RECOVERY. OTHER PROJECTS INCLUDE BROADBAND, SMALL BUSINESS AID, PUBLIC RESTROOMS, AND EV CHARGERS. TV5 REPORTS THE CITY HAS ALREADY AWARDED ALMOST \$2.4 MILLION TO PENQUIS, THE BANGOR PUBLIC LIBRARY, FRESH START AND THE MAINE DISCOVERY MUSEUM, AS WELL AS CREATING NEW HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STAFF POSITIONS.

TOXIC LEVELS OF PFAS HAVE BEEN FOUND IN A MAINE PRISON'S DRINKING WATER. THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS SAYS THREE OF THE FIVE WELLS AT THE MOUNTAIN VIEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITY IN CHARLESTON HAVE HIGHER-THAN-ACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF THE "FOREVER CHEMICALS". ACCORDING TO TV5, ALTERNATIVE WATER SOURCES WILL BE PROVIDED TO STAFF AND RESIDENTS FOR DRINKING AND COOKING AS THE PRISON WORKS ON TREATMENT AND MITIGATION. THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS WILL ALSO CONDUCT MORE FREQUENT TESTING UNTIL THE STANDARDS HAVE BEEN MET. MOUNTAIN VIEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITY CURRENTLY HOUSES 304 MALE RESIDENTS. THE TOXIC CHEMICALS, WHICH DO NOT BREAK DOWN NATURALLY OVER TIME, HAVE BEEN LINKED TO CANCER AND OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS HAS UNVEILED A \$10.3 BILLION, TWO-YEAR BUDGET PROPOSAL THAT'LL BE A STARTING POINT FOR LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSIONS. THE PROPOSAL BUILDS ON HER PREVIOUS PRIORITIES DURING HER FIRST TERM WITHOUT RAISING TAXES OR RAIDING THE STATE'S RAINY DAY FUND. THE BUDGET PROPOSAL TOPS \$10 BILLION FOR THE FIRST TIME, SOMETHING THAT'LL NO DOUBT RAISE EYEBROWS. REPUBLICANS SAID THEY'LL PRESS FOR TAX CUTS.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS IS SET TO RELEASE HER TWO-YEAR BUDGET PROPOSAL TODAY. MILLS TELLS MAINE PUBLIC THAT HER BUDGET PLAN WILL NOT CONTAIN MAJOR NEW ITEMS. INSTEAD, SHE SAYS THE PROPOSAL WILL FUND ONGOING INITIATIVES LIKE THE STATE'S FUNDING OF LOCAL EDUCATION COSTS AT 55%, PROVIDING FREE MEALS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL KIDS, AND INVESTMENTS IN CHILDCARE. THE HOUSE AND SENATE ARE CONTROLLED BY DEMOCRATS, BUT REPUBLICANS COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SHAPING THE FINAL PRODUCT, WHICH MUST BECOME LAW BEFORE JULY 1ST TO AVOID A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN.

LAST WEEK GOVERNOR JANET MILLS SIGNED AN EMERGENCY HEATING ASSISTANCE BILL TO PROVIDE NEARLY 900,000 MAINERS WITH \$450 CHECKS. OFFICIALS SAY MOST PEOPLE WHO GOT THE \$850 RELIEF CHECK LAST YEAR WILL RECEIVE THIS UPCOMING ONE. TO BE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THE CHECK, YOU NEED TO HAVE FILED YOUR 20-21 TAXES BY OCTOBER 31ST, ARE WITHIN THE INCOME LIMITS, AND ARE NOT CLAIMED AS A DEPENDENT. THE INCOME LIMITS ARE: \$200,000 FOR COUPLES FILING JOINTLY, \$150,000 FOR HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD AND \$100,000 FOR PEOPLE WHO FILE AS SINGLE OR ARE MARRIED, FILING SEPARATELY. THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCIAL SERVICES SAYS THE FIRST CHECKS SHOULD START BEING MAILED OUT IN LATE JANUARY.

GOVERNOR JANET MILLS HAS SIGNED A \$473 MILLION HEATING ASSISTANCE PACKAGE TO HELP RESIDENTS STRUGGLING WITH HIGH HEATING COSTS. SHE WASTED NO TIME WEDNESDAY AFTER LAWMAKERS GAVE FINAL APPROVAL TO THE PROPOSAL THAT WILL SEND \$450 RELIEF CHECKS TO 880,000 MAINERS. AFTERWARD, SHE JOINED LAWMAKERS AND STATE OFFICIALS AT THE AUGUSTA CIVIC CENTER, WHERE SHE WAS SWORN INTO OFFICE FOR A SECOND TERM. MILLS IS THE FIRST WOMAN TO SERVE AS GOVERNOR IN MAINE.

THE RECENT GOVERNMENT FUNDING BILL THAT INCLUDED AN ADDITIONAL \$1 BILLION DOLLARS FOR THE LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MEANS MORE MONEY FOR MAINE HOUSEHOLDS. MAINE HAS ALREADY ALLOCATED \$42.5 MILLION FOR LIHEAP THROUGH FUNDING BILLS AND NOW WILL RECEIVE AN ADDITIONAL \$6.5 MILLION. LIHEAP ELIGIBILITY IS BASED ON INCOME, FAMILY SIZE, AND THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES. TO FIND OUT HOW TO APPLY, VISIT "MAINE HOUSING (DOT) ORG" AND CLICK "PROGRAMS & SERVICES".

A COALITION IS URGING THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO ENFORCE ITS PFAS REPORTING DEADLINE. A LAW, PASSED IN JULY OF 2021, REQUIRES MANUFACTURERS TO REPORT WHY THE FOREVER CHEMICALS ARE USED IN THEIR PRODUCTS BY JANUARY 1ST, 2023. OVER THE SUMMER, A GROUP OF BUSINESSES ASKED GOVERNOR JANET MILLS FOR A 12-MONTH EXTENSION, SAYING THEY NEED MORE TIME TO COMPLY WITH WHAT THEY CALLED "A BROAD MANDATE WITH FEW DETAILS". HOWEVER, A COALITION OF MAINE FARMS, NONPROFITS, WASTEWATER DISTRICTS, TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVES, AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS SAYS THE ORIGINAL DEADLINE NEEDS TO BE UPHELD TO PREVENT FURTHER PFAS-RELATED HEALTH CONCERNS.