



Senator Mark LAWRENCE

DISTRICT 35

Proudly representing the people of Eliot, Kittery, Ogunquit, South Berwick, York and part of Berwick

Dear friends,

To say that 2020 has been a whirlwind would be an understatement. When the Legislature reconvened in January, I returned to Augusta ready to deliver for Maine families. As Chair of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee, I was gearing up to work on legislation to protect consumers' rights and our environment. Like most people, my colleagues and I never expected to be grappling with a deadly pandemic and its devastating consequences, both personal, with family and friends contracting the virus, and economic, with our beloved small businesses and tourism industry hurting.

“The challenges facing us right now strengthen my commitment to make Maine a better place to live, work, raise a family and eventually retire.”

As Mainers, we solve our greatest problems by getting people around the table and working together. It's why I often rely on you, my constituents, to ask questions, share stories and offer feedback. The challenges facing us right now strengthen my commitment to make Maine a better place to live, work, raise a family and eventually retire.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, my colleagues and I didn't let up. This year, we worked to:

- **Fix our broken health care system** – I supported a suite of laws that put patients before profits. The new laws put an end to both surprise and abusive billing practices and capped the out-of-pocket cost of insulin.
- **Grow the Rainy Day Fund to a historic high** – We added even more money to the state's Rainy Day Fund, growing it to \$258 million, the highest amount since the fund was created in 1985.
- **Support Maine seniors** – With many assisted-living facilities and nursing homes in trouble, we passed legislation to increase reimbursement rates so our seniors can continue to get the quality, compassionate care they deserve.

This year, we made a lot of progress, but our work is not over. It's why I voted twice to reconvene the Legislature so we could finish delivering for you. I want you to know that I'm still here, working for you and your family. I still believe in the unwavering spirit of Maine people. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at Mark.Lawrence@legislature.maine.gov or by calling (207) 287-1515.

CONTACT MARK:

MAIL

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

PHONE

Office: (207) 287-1515
Cell: (207) 475-4975

ONLINE

Mark.Lawrence@legislature.maine.gov
www.mainesenate.org



I presented the Maine flag to Eliot Town Manager Dana Lee.

Investing in Maine's future generations

It's critical that we invest in our state now, in order to thrive in the future. **To prosper, we need to support Maine's children and young adults. It's why last year in the state's two-year budget, we made it a top priority to invest in education of all types.** This year, we allocated an additional \$37.2 million for public schools, \$2.5 million for community college workforce training, \$1.6 million for career and technical education, and \$1.2 million for adult education programs. While I'm extremely proud of what we accomplished, there's more work to do.

Making sure working families don't get left behind

Working families are the cornerstones of our communities and economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit them hard. As we look to reopen and rebuild, I'll work to make sure you, your family and your small business don't get left behind.

Last year, we fought to ensure Mainers are paid what they're worth, from promoting equal pay for equal work and preventing wage theft, to increasing the minimum teacher salary and defending retirement benefits for first responders. We took action against predatory student lending companies and questionable for-profit colleges that take advantage of Mainers trying to advance their careers through higher education. We also passed a first-in-the-nation earned, paid-time off law, which protects public health and allows workers to care for sick loved ones or deal with emergencies.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Maine, lawmakers quickly expanded unemployment eligibility. Unfortunately, shortcomings in the system, inadequate staffing and other problems left many struggling to access their benefits. Mainers deserve better. This summer's Labor Committee meetings with MDOL are only the start. We must fix our broken unemployment system so it's there for hardworking Mainers when they need it.

Responding quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic

When Maine reported its first case of COVID-19, the Legislature unanimously passed laws to support Maine families, small businesses and public health. We approved a responsible spending package that prioritized public health nursing, Maine's CDC and senior care while growing the Rainy Day Fund to \$258 million, a historic high. We expanded unemployment benefits, made sure students wouldn't go hungry, prohibited utility companies from terminating service, and put \$11 million into a COVID-19 fund.

Since we adjourned, I've worked with countless Mainers to solve problems, get unemployment benefits and access critical resources. The stories are often heartbreaking, but this is what we are elected to do — fight for the people we represent. I've pressed state and federal agencies to improve small business programs, increase access to health care, provide rental and housing relief, and support heritage industries from farming to fishing. Key legislative committees have continued to meet, getting stakeholders and the administration around the table to come up with solutions.



At a press conference with several of my colleagues, advocating for environmental policy changes.

Protecting our environment and natural resources

In 2020, the Legislature built on our successes from last year to expand Maine's energy independence and encourage the hiring and training of Maine workers for jobs in the growing clean energy industry. We also passed legislation to strengthen Maine's Renewable Portfolio Standard. A commission was convened to bring together government, industry and other experts to analyze the benefits of energy storage technology and to chart a path for Maine to expand its storage capacity, which will help lower emissions and increase our use of renewable energy. The Maine Climate Council continued its work on everything from reducing carbon emissions, to building resiliency in the face of climate change, to reducing heating bills, especially for low-income and rural Mainers.

“Mark is a strong leader in the Senate and in his community. His environmental record is impeccable, and he stands up for racial justice. Thank you, Mark!”

- Mallory Cook, South Berwick Town Council



My daughter worked at classic Ogunquit bakery, Bread & Roses last summer. We were honored to give the owner of this bakery, Mary Breen, a Legislative Sentiment to celebrate her 30th year in business!

Standing up for our small business community

Throughout this pandemic, Maine businesses have gone above and beyond to keep people healthy and safe, whether it's shifting to curbside pick-up or to manufacturing personal protective equipment. Now, workers and businesses deserve our support.

As this pandemic has highlighted, reliable, high-speed internet is essential for businesses, education and telehealth. This year, we passed measures to expand internet access in underserved areas including a \$15 million broadband bond and to streamline grant applications.

Earlier this year, I stood with Maine lobstermen when senseless federal restrictions threatened their livelihoods and personal safety. I worked with my colleagues to ensure farmers don't lose out when their product is mislabeled by establishing a process to correct a mistake. Maine's heritage industries are too important to our economy. In the past two years, we also helped farmers grow and sell more produce by promoting local foods in schools, partnerships with food insecurity programs and new food processing facilities.

When the Legislature reconvenes, we need to do more. There are measures to promote Maine-based companies and goods whenever taxpayer dollars are spent, create good-paying jobs, support emerging industries and help Maine companies get back on their feet, and we need to pass them now.

Fixing our broken health care system

Too often the high cost of health care prevents hardworking Mainers from getting basic medical care. This is true whether it's the cost of prescription drugs, outrageous health insurance premiums or surprise medical bills. Enough is enough — my colleagues and I worked to change that.

In 2019, we took on “Big Pharma” and won, passing an aggressive prescription drug reform package. These new laws improve drug price transparency, hold “middlemen” accountable, create an affordability board, and allow for wholesale prescription drug importation from Canada. In recent months, we adopted a wholesale importation plan and sent it to the FDA for approval. We also passed a new law to hold drug manufacturers accountable for their role in the opioid epidemic. Maine is now leading the way on prescription drug reform.

This year, I supported a suite of bills designed to put patients before profits. We clamped down on abusive billing practices and patient fees that nickel and dime families at every turn.

Over the last two years, we worked to make sure insurance companies don't stand in the way of care by enshrining patient protections into state law, improving

coverage of telehealth medicine, and eliminating the waiting period for children's dental coverage. We also stepped up to fill gaps in rural health care by investing in rural hospitals, funding ambulance services, allowing EMTs to work in hospital settings, and recognizing the care that physician assistants can provide. We made serious progress, but the COVID-19 pandemic proves that we can't stop now.



With my family in the Senate Chamber



SURVEY: I want to hear from you!

1. What is your biggest concern in the wake of COVID-19?

- Keeping your family safe and healthy
- Making sure you can pay your bills
- Supporting struggling small businesses
- Addressing racial disparities in COVID-19 cases
- Reopening the state's economy
- Protecting good-paying jobs
- Other (please specify):

2. What should Maine's focus be as we restart our economy?

- Providing direct relief to workers
- Keeping workers healthy and safe
- Providing direct relief to businesses
- Supporting Maine's tourism industry
- Investing in high-speed, reliable internet
- Other (please specify):

3. COVID-19 has exposed key health care challenges in Maine. What is the biggest challenge you face?

- High cost of prescription drugs
- High cost of health care coverage
- Surprise medical bills and fees

- Lack of medical services in our area
- Other (please specify):

4. COVID-19 has also exposed where Maine still needs work. What should be our biggest priority next year?

- Making sure more people can get health care
- Expanding high-speed, reliable internet
- Investing in education, career tech and child care
- Improving access to affordable housing
- Protecting natural resources
- Other (please specify):

5. What grade would you give Maine's COVID-19 response? _____

I appreciate your comments. Please feel free to contact me anytime if I may ever be of assistance.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

To fill out this survey online,
go to www.mainesenate.org/2020Survey