

Maine Legislature

Office of the Presiding Officers

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Presiding Officers schedule emergency heating assistance public hearing for Wednesday, make temporary appointments to the budget committee

AUGUSTA – Today, Senate President Troy Jackson, D-Allagash, and House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross, D-Portland, announced temporary appointments to the Legislature’s Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee for the purpose of holding a public hearing on the proposed [Winter Emergency Energy Relief package](#). A public hearing has been scheduled for 1 p.m., Wednesday, December 21.

Lawmakers, interested parties, and members of the public can participate in-person or via zoom.

“Right now, what matters most is getting Maine people the heating assistance and energy relief they desperately need as soon as possible. Rather than thrust this issue onto a brand new committee, Speaker Talbot Ross and I have appointed a temporary Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee in order to hold an efficient public hearing next week and hopefully set this bipartisan proposal up for future success,” **said President Jackson**. “As I said on swearing-in day, Maine people are counting on us to rise to the occasion and deliver a compromise energy relief package that treats this heating crisis like the emergency it is. We cannot let them down.”

“Maine people need help now with heating costs. Temperatures are dropping and the bills are only increasing. And countless others are dealing with the very real possibility of eviction with the end of a vital rental assistance program. It was unacceptable to me to leave these Maine families in crisis at quite possibly the worst time of the year,” **said Speaker Talbot Ross**. “All members of legislative leadership are in complete agreement that we continue to do everything in our power to advance legislation that will provide direct relief as quickly as possible. We’ve made temporary appointments to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, scheduled a public hearing and urge our colleagues to join us in passing this critical legislation.”

“It doesn't matter whether you're Republican or Democrat, we are all Maine people first and foremost and today's agreement continues the storied tradition of Maine bipartisanship and

protects the institution of the Legislature," **said Senate Republican Leader Trey Stewart, R-Aroostook.** "I thank both President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross for their willingness to ensure that transparency and the feedback of the people we represent are prioritized as we work to provide relief to Maine people before the holidays."

"We were all sent to Augusta to work for our constituents, not to work against the other party. That is why I am pleased to join with the leaders of the 3 other caucuses to hold a public hearing on the Governor's Energy Relief bill," **said House Republican Leader Billy Bob Faulkingham, R-Winter Harbor.** "I'm confident that after thorough public review and input, the legislature will be able to move swiftly to deliver relief for the people of Maine."

Temporary Appointments to the Legislature's Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

- Senate President Troy Jackson of Allagash as Senate Chair
- Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland as House Chair
- Senate Majority Leader Eloise Vitelli of Arrowsic
- Senate Minority Leader Harold "Trey" Stewart, III of Presque Isle
- House Democratic Leader Maureen Terry of Gorham
- House Democratic Assistant Leader Kristen Cloutier of Lewiston
- Honorable Anne Perry of Calais
- Honorable James Dill of Old Town
- Honorable Scott Landry of Farmington
- House Republican Leader William Faulkingham of Winter Harbor*
- House Republican Assistant Leader Amy Arata of New Gloucester
- Honorable Sawin Millett of Waterford
- Honorable John E. Ducharme of Madison

For procedural reasons, the public hearing will be on LD 3, a piece of legislation that mirrors the compromise measure [LD 1, "An Act to Provide Funding for Winter Emergency Energy Relief and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program"](#). The posture of LD 1 remains in the House of Representatives in non-concurrence until the legislature reconvenes, after failing to get the required two-thirds vote in the Senate. The vote in the Senate was 21-8 despite a strong bipartisan vote of 125-16 in the House of Representatives. Any action that would change the posture of LD 1 — including sending to committee for a public hearing — would require the action of the full legislature.

Maine's Constitution requires emergency legislation to garner the support of two-thirds of elected members in both the House and the Senate. Emergency legislation would take effect immediately upon being signed into law by the Governor. The next scheduled session date is January 4. Any meeting prior would be considered a 'special session' and require a majority of lawmakers in each party and in each chamber to agree to reconvene.

KEY PROVISIONS IN THE WINTER EMERGENCY ENERGY RELIEF PACKAGE:

- **Emergency Energy Relief Payment:** \$398 million to fund a one-time \$450 energy relief payment to an estimated 880,000 eligible Maine people, amounting to \$900 in relief for the average Maine family. Recipients will have filed a 2021 Maine individual income tax return as a full-time resident and not be claimed as an independent on another's tax return.

Eligible Maine people will have a Federal adjusted gross income (FAGI) of less than: \$100,000 if filing single, if married and filing separately; \$150,000 if filing as head of household; or \$200,000 for couples filing jointly. Eligible Maine people do not need to take any action to receive the payment. **If the Legislature enacts the Plan as an emergency measure, the Mills Administration expects the payments to be distributed beginning in mid-January 2023.**

- **Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) Supplement:** \$40 million to supplement the Home Energy Assistance Program, a Federal program administered by MaineHousing through local Maine Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) that helps qualified homeowners and renters pay for heating costs, including fuel and emergency fuel delivery. The supplemental funding, which nearly doubles the amount of existing Federal funding, will allow MaineHousing to provide HEAP recipients a financial benefit equal to last year's benefit. **Without this supplemental funding, households would receive, on average, just half the heating fuel or equivalent benefit given the increased price of energy.** Benefits are paid directly to heating fuel providers.
- **Emergency Home Heating Oil:** \$10 million to Maine Community Action Partnerships to help them deliver emergency fuel assistance to prevent people and families from running out of heating fuel and experiencing a heating crisis. With this supplemental funding, it is estimated that 12,500 homes may be eligible for up to \$800 in emergency funds to avert a heating crisis.
- **Short-Term Housing Support:** \$21 million to bolster the Emergency Housing Relief Fund created by Governor Mills and the Legislature earlier this year that supports emergency housing and emergency shelters to prevent people from experiencing homelessness this winter. Governor Mills and the Legislature had capitalized the fund with \$22 million earlier this year.

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