

OPPOSE

LD 483 – An Act to Promote Small Businesses by Enhancing the Use of On-premises Signs

Sponsor: Representative KESCHL of Belgrade

Co-Sponsors: Senator SAVIELLO, Representatives CHASE of Wells, CLARK of Easton, DUNPHY of Emden, FREDETTE of Newport, NUTTING of Oakland, and WINSOR of Norway.

Summary: The bill proposes a broad range of changes to Maine laws that limit “on premises” advertising along Maine roadways.

Explanation: This bill would greatly increase visual pollution and scenic impacts in Maine from road signs by increasing the size, height, and number of signs located near businesses, and causing a proliferation in digital signs with constantly changing images. The bill is very similar to legislation (LD 1405) that was defeated 13-0 by the Transportation Committee in May 2011. The title has changed and a few provisions have been altered, but NRCM remains strongly against the bill for all the same reasons.

LD 1483 amends Maine law to decrease the protection of scenic resources by stating that only “off premises signs” are “detrimental to the preservation of scenic resources.” Signs located “on-premises” are thus deemed to not have any impact on scenic resources. The bill also deletes the finding in existing law that outdoor advertising “is not an effective method of providing information to tourists about available facilities,” and it deletes the finding that “outdoor advertising is hazardous to highway users.”

The bill then significantly broadens allowable locations for “on-premises” signs, increases distance that signs can be located from principle structures or points of interest (using the broader definition) from 1000 to 2500 ft., allows signs to be closer (20 ft.) to roads of 25 ft. in width, and dramatically increases the allowable size height, length, and width of signs for food, fuel, or lodging along Interstates from 20 ft. high, long, and wide and a total area of 150 feet to 100 feet high, 35 feet wide or long and 400 square feet in area. This change is done in steps – smaller signs allowed nearer the Interstate and the biggest signs allowed further from the road. Height of signs along other roads are increased to 35 feet (from 25 feet), more approach signs are allowed and can be located on any land contiguous to the business, and loosens limits on changeable display (electronic) signs. It also exempts real estate signs from current legal restrictions.

There is no way to assess LD 1405 other than it would be a major chipping away of Maine’s billboard ban, resulting in significant harm to Maine’s natural landscape. The number, size, and obtrusiveness of “on-premises” signs would greatly expand. The bill explicitly reverses state policy which concludes that outdoor advertising has a negative impact on the preservation of Maine’s scenic resources. The driving experience in Maine would start to seem like other states, where billboards and roadside advertising are unconstrained. With so many travelers now receiving information from smart phones, GPS devices, and on-board information systems, it is highly questionable that the proliferation of signs anticipated in this bill would have any significant value – but it would have very substantial impacts.

NRCM Opposes LD 1405.