

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 electronic signs with constantly changing images. The bill is very similar to a proposal that was defeated in May 2011 with a unanimous 13-0 vote of the Transportation Committee. Although the title and a few provisions have been changed, NRCM remains strongly opposed to the bill and urges that it be defeated.

LD 483 explicitly reverses state policy which concludes that outdoor advertising has a negative impact on the preservation of Maine’s scenic resources. The bill would decrease the protection of scenic resources in Maine by amending existing statute so that only “off premises” signs (aka billboards) are determined to be harmful to the preservation of scenic resources, whereas “on-premises” signs are asserted to have no such impact. The bill deletes the finding in existing law that outdoor advertising “is not an effective method of providing information to tourists about available facilities,” it deletes the finding that “outdoor advertising is hazardous to highway users,” and it amends Maine’s law banning billboards so that it is no longer the policy of the state to prohibit and control the indiscriminate use of outdoor advertising so long as those signs are “on the site of the business.”

The bill also significantly broadens allowable locations for on-premises signs, increases the distance that signs can be located from principle structures or points of interest (using the broader definition) from 1000 to 1500 ft., allows signs to be closer (20 ft) to roads of 25 ft. in width, and increases the allowable height of on-premise signs. More and larger approach signs are allowed for businesses located more than 1,000 feet from a public way intersection, and such signs can be located on any land contiguous to the business—which could cause sign proliferation throughout Maine. The bill also loosens limits on changeable display (electronic) signs, allowing them to change images once every minute instead of the once every 20 minutes in current law.

The primary beneficiaries of this bill would be sign manufacturers, at the expense of Maine’s natural landscape and the character of Maine communities. As the number, size, and obtrusiveness of on-premises signs expanded, the driving experience in Maine would start to seem like that of states where roadside advertising seems 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—and a new “sign war” with electronic signs--would provide any value to small businesses. But the impacts to the Maine brand could be very real.

NRCM Opposes LD 483.