

District I—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont



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With 400,000 drones sold for Christmas, there are now more than 1 million being flown in the US. In 2015, FAA reported 764 hazardous incidents involving “near misses” between drones and airlines, and drone flights in sensitive and prohibited locations putting people and property in danger. AMA’s analysis of FAA’s incident reports showed 27 were actually described by pilots as a “near miss.” Two of these crashes involved military operations, others were commercial flights, and some were legal, safe flights below 400 feet. FAA’s incident analysis and reporting doesn’t accurately quantify or qualify the number or type of incidents that are hazardous.

The media’s reporting of misleading FAA reports have prompted the rise in state and local bills as legislators respond to their constituents’ fears. In 2015, we identified, tracked, and opposed state and local sUAS/drone legislation with letters, testimony at hearings, and speaking directly to lawmakers. These efforts amended or prevented the passage of bills that could have adversely impaired model aircraft flying in New England.

In January 2016, while searching state legislative calendars for sUAS/drone bills that might be problematic for AMA members’ flying, we found two bills in Rhode Island and two bills in New Hampshire that we needed to oppose.

The first, New Hampshire HB602, was introduced on January 8, 2015. The item of most concern was “No person shall operate a drone at an altitude below 400 feet within 5 miles of any



These New Hampshire members and AVPs opposed onerous model aircraft legislation.

airport in this state.” Our opposition to this bill was based on the nine AMA clubs that had operated safely without incident at these types of locations for decades with permission from and blessings of the airport authorities.

As a result of our testimony and recommendations on February 10, 2015, the bill was amended to read “No government or person shall operate a drone within 5 miles of any airport in this state in a manner that does not comply with relevant federal law and Federal Aviation Administration regulations and guidelines in effect at the time.” This amendment was passed on January 7, 2016; however, the bill will proceed to the Senate and must be watched for any possible amendments requiring additional AMA opposition.

The second, New Hampshire SB459, was introduced on January 6, 2016. The item of most concern was “drones flies no higher than 100 feet above land.” Two new associate vice presidents (AVPs), Daren Hudson and Ted Wojcik, along with Jay Francis, spearheaded the opposition to the bill by writing and speaking with senators and bringing together a team of 20 members (above photo) to oppose and/or testify at the January 26 hearing.

Their opposition was based on the hazards of conflicts with other model aircraft, pilots, or spectators when flying in a flight box with a compressed

altitude of 100 feet above ground level, allowing little time for error recovery. They also relied on the FAA’s recent notification fact sheet, *State & Local Regulations of UAS*, which essentially informs local lawmakers that FAA views its authority to regulate UAS safety operations in the national airspace as pervasive and exclusive.

As a result of the AMA team’s opposition and recommendations, the bill was sent for interim study and is unlikely to appear again without being amended. In order to really appreciate the breadth and depth of AMA member testimony, use the following link to the audio recording: www.gencourt.state.nh.us/senateaudio/committees/2016/Trans/SB0459_01262016.asx.

The next two bills from Rhode Island legislators, HB7334 and HB7511, have been opposed in letters of opposition, but until hearing dates and testimony is made, I will hold off on a status report.

We are in the process of creating AMA District Advocacy & Government Relations Officers to represent each state. If you have an interest in becoming a team member for your state, please contact Daren Hudson at dth7@comcast.net or me.

Thank you to all of those AMA members who participated in opposing unnecessary sUAS/model aircraft legislation. 🛩️

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