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

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AMA heroes saved nine New Hampshire flying sites from being closed. (L-R) Jay Francis, who spearheaded the efforts, Dan Weed, Rob Lawrence, Tom Francis, Pete Magoun, and Mike Miller, joined District I Vice President Andy Argenio in speaking and supporting opposition to HB602 legislation to stop flying within 5 miles of airports.

High profile incidents involving sUAS/drones/model aircraft in recent months have prompted a new wave of legislation introduced in New England. I have received calls and emails from AMA members concerned about the status of bills that, if passed, would prevent or severely restrict model aircraft flying.

I have been tracking drone legislation introduced in District I since 2013 using www.legiscan.com. The following 2015 UAS/drone bills are being tracked: Rhode Island H5293, H5292, and H5453; Connecticut HB5380, SB797, SB971, and SB974; New Hampshire HB602 and SB222; Maine HB482; Vermont HB302 and SB18.Proposed bills in Massachusetts have died in chamber.

Most of the legislation deals with privacy restrictions and warrant requirements for state law enforcement and public agencies. Other bills want to establish task forces to study drones or create standards and penalties for drone operations.

In the past month, we have addressed New Hampshire's HB602 and Rhode Island's HB5453, because passage of these bills would dramatically impact model aircraft flying. On February 6, 2015, I was contacted by Jay Francis, the secretary of the Granite Quiet Flyers in New Hampshire, regarding HB602 that would regulate the use of drones by government agencies and individuals.

Section 644-A:4 Airport Prohibition states, "No government or person shall operate a drone at an altitude below 400 feet within 5 miles of any airport in this state." Jay created a map of all the airports in New Hampshire and I compared all the GPS locations of AMA chartered flying sites to determine that nine of 29 sites in the state would be closed. Losing a third of the state's flying sites is unacceptable.

We wrote individual letters to all the bill's sponsors and the assigned committee members of the Executive Departments and Administration, providing a number of reasons for opposition to this airport prohibition. The clubs in question had been flying at these sites for years without incidents endangering people, property, or manned-aircraft operations.

The letter explained that in the US, several hundred of the more than 2,450 AMA clubs have a long history of operating within 5 miles of an airport. They enjoy this privilege because the clubs and their members are recognized as worthwhile tenants providing a watchful eye, protecting and maintaining the site areas they occupy.

Airport managers and security personal have frequently informed us that the presence of AMA clubs in the vicinity of their airports deters those who would operate model aircraft carelessly or recklessly. Having the benefit of many AMA clubs and members, where people of all ages who are new to the hobby can go to learn how to fly a model aircraft responsibly and safely in accordance with AMA's Safety Code, has proven to be an excellent method to help maintain a safe and secure airspace.

AMA's answer to safety has always been "educate before you regulate." The letter spoke about how the AMA works in a collaborative effort with the FAA to evolve AMA's safety standards by mitigating risks to accommodate new technologies that meet or exceed FAA requirements for safe UAS flying.

It stated that because members of the AMA have maintained an impeccable safety record, model aviation regulations for AMA's community-based organization were exempted from FAA regulation and signed into law by President Barack Obama on February 14, 2012, as Public Law 112-95 section 336 (c).

The letter ended by urging the legislators to allow AMA clubs and members to operate as Congress provided in their exemption criteria for model aircraft by amending HB602 to include the following exclusion provision: "Nothing in this bill may be construed to apply to model aircraft as defined in section 336 (c) of the Modernization and Reform Act of 2012."

Several days later we heard that the bill would not move forward, but would be retained by the committee for further study until January 2016. This was a win for AMA clubs in New Hampshire that resulted from the combined efforts of AMA members who joined Jay and me to speak to the New Hampshire legislators.

Rhode Island's HB5453 is the most troublesome because it creates registration requirements and restricted locations for flying near airports, public buildings, and schools. Letters of opposition have been sent to all of the legislators. I will let you know how things turn out next month.

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