

Advocacy Updates: Public Safety and Transportation

VLCT has identified public safety and transportation as a key topic to follow during the 2024 legislative session. Check back for the latest updates on this issue. Or, view our [Weekly Legislative Reports](#) page to see everything we're following.

[Senate-Passed Transport'n Bill has Town Hwy Aid and Traffic Calming, Study Ordered for Firearm Prohibition – Apr 26, 2024](#)

Senate Amends and Passes H.868, the FY25 Transportation Program and Budget

The annual Transportation Bill, H.868, cleared the full Senate with several changes of interest to municipalities. As reported in our March 15 update, this year's Transportation Budget included an increase to the Town Highway Aid Program. The Senate also approved two new amendments. The first, recorded on [page 818 and 828 of the 4/23 Senate Journal](#), would allow municipalities to implement traffic calming and slowing measures when involved in complete streets projects. The second amendment, recorded on [page 830](#), would add a new registration surcharge of \$89 for fully electric vehicles and \$44.50 for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. This new surcharge is the start of an effort to capture some of the transportation revenue lost because electric vehicles do not pay gas tax. However, this particular new revenue will not go into the general transportation fund: it is dedicated to supporting new electrical vehicle charging stations.

Amendment to Allow Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms in Municipal Buildings Fails, but Report Language Emerges

As reported here last week, Representative James Harrison from the town of Chittenden proposed amending [S.209](#), known as “the ghost gun bill”, to include a provision that would allow municipalities to adopt an ordinance prohibiting the possession of firearms within a municipal building. His amendment failed. However, [House Judiciary Committee](#) Chair Martin LaLonde proposed a new amendment, recorded on [page 3821 of the 4/24 House Calendar](#),

which is likely to pass, for a “Report on Firearms in Municipal Buildings” to be issued by the Office of the Secretary of State, VLCT, and the Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Association.

This report, due on or before January 15, 2025, shall include recommendations on

(1) whether the preferable approach is:

(A) for the General Assembly to pass a statute prohibiting firearms in municipal buildings statewide, or

(B) for municipalities to be provided with the authority to decide whether to pass an ordinance prohibiting firearms in municipal buildings;

(2) whether a statewide prohibition should include a definition of the term “municipal building,” and if so, what that definition should be; and

(3) which municipal buildings should be covered and which should not be covered by a prohibition on possessing firearms in municipal buildings.

[Several Commonsense Public Safety Bills; Possibility of Prohibiting Firearms from Municipal Buildings — Apr 19, 2024](#)

Public Safety Bills Update

We continue to follow several commonsense public safety bills and remain optimistic they will make it to the finish line.

- H.534, a bill aimed at reducing retail theft by increasing the penalties for repeated thefts, was recommended favorably for a second reading on the Senate Floor. The latest version of [H.534](#) can be found on page 2571 of the April 19, Senate Calendar.
- H.563, a bill that establishes penalties for attempted auto theft, passed the full House in February and passed the full Senate with amendment on April 16. The full House will now consider the Senate-amended version of [H.563](#), found on page 3749 of the House Calendar.
- The House Judiciary Committee is considering two bills passed by the Senate: [S.196](#), a bill that would permit evidence to be considered in bail hearings, and [S.195](#), a bill that would add the number of offenses a defendant is charged with and the recent history of

pending charges against a defendant as factors a court considers in imposing conditions of release.

- The Senate Health and Welfare Committee amended H.72, a bill that authorizes Safe Injection or Overdose Prevention sites. The amended version of [H.72](#), found in on page 2565 of the Senate Calendar, grants \$1.1 million in fiscal year 2025 Opioid Settlement funds to the City of Burlington for establishing an overdose prevention center upon submission of a grant proposal that has been approved by the Burlington City Council. The original bill contained a provision that gave municipalities that ability to “opt-in” to hosting one of the two pilot sites funded with \$2M Opioid Settlements funds.

[Amendment Proposed to S.209 Would Authorize Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms in Municipal Buildings](#)

Representative James Harrison from Chittenden has proposed amending [S.209](#) a bill known as “the ghost gun bill” to include a provision that would allow municipalities to adopt an ordinance prohibiting the possession of firearms within a municipal building. The [proposed amendment to Section 7 of 24 VSA § 2291](#) reads: “Notwithstanding subdivision (A) of this subdivision, the legislative body of a municipality may adopt an ordinance that prohibits the possession of a firearm within a municipal building or portion of a municipal building. The ordinance may exempt law enforcement officers, security personnel, or similar officers from the prohibition on firearm possession within a municipal building.” [The House Committee on Judiciary](#) has scheduled testimony on Rep Harrison’s amendment.

[More Town Highway Aid Advances in Key House Committees; Public Safety Bills Gain Momentum – Mar 15, 2024](#)

[House Transportation Budget Increases Town Highway Aid](#)

As mentioned in the Transportation section of [What Governor Scott's Proposed Budget Means for Municipalities](#), funding for the Town Highway program was up 6%, exceeding Governor Scott's baseline budget growth of 3.6% for fiscal year 2025 (FY25). It was a small increase, but it reached a new milestone of over \$100M in town highway aid.

The House Transportation Committee advanced [H.868](#) (the FY25 Transportation Budget) on a vote of 11 to 0, and the House Appropriations Committee approved H.868 on March 14 by a unanimous vote of all present committee members. The [House Transportation Committee budget](#) increased the Town Highway Structures program by \$1M and the general Town Highway Aid program by \$860,000, bringing total town highway aid to \$102.5M, the largest budget in history. The largest increases over the FY24 budget are a 21.9% increase in the Town Highway Bridge program, bringing its total to \$45.3M, and a 13.5% increase in the Town Highway Structures program, bringing its total to \$8.4M. The full House should vote on H.868 next week. Be sure to thank your representative on the [House Transportation](#) and [House Appropriations](#) Committees.

Progress on Public Safety Bills

Several commonsense bills focused on public safety are gaining momentum as crossover — the deadline for bills to pass out of committee of jurisdiction — approaches.

- [H.534](#), a bill aimed at [reducing retail theft](#), passed the full house on March 14 and will now be considered in the Senate Judiciary Committee.
- [H.563](#), a bill that establishes penalties for attempted auto theft, passed the full House in February and is also being considered in the Senate Judiciary Committee.
- [S.196](#), a bill that would permit evidence to be considered in bail hearings, is noticed for a final vote in the Senate. This bill aims to better account for threats of physical violence in bail hearings.
- We continue to watch and hope that [S.195](#), a bill that would consider recent pending charges against a defendant in imposing conditions of release, advances or is included one of the public safety bills already advancing.

In addition, we continue to keep an eye on [H.72](#), a bill that authorizes safe injection or overdose prevention sites. Currently the bill contains a provision that gives municipalities the ability to “opt-in” to hosting one of the two pilot sites funded with \$2M that has been set aside for the establishment, management, and staffing of these new facilities. Some senators are reportedly in support of removing the opt-in provision for municipalities. **Please let [your senators](#) know that municipalities want a say in the location and siting of safe injection**

or overdose prevention facilities.

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