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Representative Lawrence Bliss (D-South Portland)

P R E S S R E L E A S E

For Details, Contact:

Amy Watson Saxton, Legislative Aide
House Majority Office
Direct Phone: 207 287-1430

Representative Bliss Submits Insurance Watchdog Bill

South Portland, January 15, 2007

Representative Lawrence Bliss (D-South Portland) has submitted a bill to the State Legislature that is designed to protect individual insurance buyers from excessive rate increases and unusual or excessive fees. The bill, which has not yet been given a "Legislative Document Number," will be sent to the Committee on Insurance and Banking for debate and deliberation.

Bliss has worked closely with the Office of the Public Advocate in his role as Chairman of the Utilities and Energy Committee of the Legislature. "The Public Advocate is responsible for looking out for the average citizen when utilities ask for changes in their rate structure or fees," says Bliss. "This bill would expand the role of the Public Advocate to include insurance issues."

"If you challenge an insurance rate increase, it's you against their table full of high-power attorneys. You have no chance. With this bill, the Public Advocate can move in and argue on your behalf. It's simply an effort to level the playing field, so that Maine citizens don't feel like they're helpless in the face of excessive rate increases," Bliss says.

In the utilities arena, the cost of running the Office of the Public Advocate is covered by assessments charged to the various utilities. In the Bliss bill, insurance companies would be required to pay a fee every time they request a rate increase. These cumulative fees would go to fund the work of the Public Advocate in this area. No public funds would be required.

"The Insurance Commissioner is charged with deciding these issues. It's reasonable to expect that someone should be available to help citizens who chose to challenge the actions taken by the insurance companies," Bliss reasons. "With one company requesting another twenty percent increase this year, and with so many self-employed Maine workers struggling to keep up, I think a bill like this just makes sense."

"The real question," said Bliss, "is whether we are willing to watch out for our citizens. I believe that we should, and that this plan makes a great deal of sense for everyone."

