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Law School News

Meet Maine's New AG, Aaron Frey '08

As attorney general, Frey will focus on opioid crisis, criminal justice reform, environmental safeguards and state relations with Maine's tribal nations.



Maine Attorney General Aaron M. Frey '08 Image Credit: Troy R. Bennett/Bangor Daily News

January 11, 2019 Michael M. Bowden

AUGUSTA, Maine, Jan. 11, 2019 – Bangor defense attorney and three-term state representative Aaron M. Frey '08 was sworn in on Jan. 8 as Maine's new Attorney General, succeeding Janet Mills, who was elected the state's first-ever female governor.

"I am honored and excited to lead a department with such a talented professional staff who work tirelessly on behalf of the people of Maine," Frey said. "I look forward to working productively with Maine's legislature and executive branch in what I hope will be a new era of cooperation and civility in state government, leading to positive results for our state."

In a conversation Thursday, Frey, 39, credited Roger Williams School of Law with shaping many of his legal perspectives. "By my first or second day at RWU Law, I'd met the justices of the Rhode Island Supreme Court," he said, "Throughout my time there, I had access to top-notch lawyers, well-established in their fields. Roger Williams opened a lot of doors for me, and also opened my mind about what was possible with a law degree."

RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky returned the compliment.

“We are proud to count Attorney General Frey as one of our alumni, not least because of his dedication to public service,” Yelnosky said. “He has been a member of the Maine House of Representatives since 2012 and now, just over ten years after graduating from the law school, he has become the top law enforcement officer in Maine. He came from Maine to Rhode Island to get the training he needed to return home and pursue his dreams. We congratulate him and wish him the best of luck.”

Frey noted that the number of Roger Williams lawyers in Maine was significant and growing fast.

Much Work to Do

Two of Frey's early goals as AG, he said, include finding better ways to fight Maine's growing opioid crisis, and instituting criminal justice reform – issues he sees as intimately related.

“Our jails are essentially being used to control populations that are already under siege by drug and economic issues,” he explained. “There has been too much focus on retribution and not enough on addressing the underlying issues and encouraging rehabilitation.”

Other priorities include bolstering state environmental protections and improving governmental relations with Maine's four federally recognized tribal groups – the Micmac, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot – which have deteriorated since outgoing Republican Gov. Paul LePage rescinded the state's agreement setting guidelines for the relationship.

“I want to get all parties sitting at a table again, and ensure that a constructive dialog resumes,” Frey said.

Maine Democrats surged to power after winning the governorship and 110 of 186 legislative seats in last November's election, which – in a famously “purple” state – was widely seen by pundits as a referendum on both President Donald Trump and LePage. In a speech following his election, Frey criticized the pair for policies “inconsistent with our Maine values,” citing rollbacks of environmental protections and efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Frey won the AG seat in a five-way race among Democrats in December. Under the state's unique system for filling three important government posts (AG, secretary of state, and treasurer), the Maine Legislature elected Frey – a three-term Democratic representative for Bangor and Orono – to a two-year term.

Because Frey had just won his fourth term in the Maine House in November, a special election to fill his now vacant seat is likely to take place in February.