



Maine Municipal
Association

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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition to LD 900

An Act To Expand the Rights of Public Employees under the Maine Labor Laws

April 17, 2019

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Garrett Corbin and I am offering this testimony in opposition to LD 900 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association at the direction our statewide Legislative Policy Committee.

Basic safety, dignity, and living wages have historically been the catalysts for strikes. Labor and other laws enacted by past legislatures have led to significant protections for public sector workers and reductions in workplace injuries. The wages of local government employees are generally recognized as moderate. Municipal managers are constantly balancing the pressure to cap or reduce property taxes with requests to increase salaries and services, all while confronting drastic reductions to the state-municipal revenue sharing program.

The public depends upon municipal services. There is no question that police and fire protection are essential to protecting public safety – perhaps that is why the language of the legislation excepts employees “whose duties include protecting public safety.” There is little question that water and sewer services are essential as well, yet there is ample question as to whether or not these employees would fall under the exception.

It does not take long for citizens to notice, and become frustrated, by delays in core local government functions such as paving and traffic management, vehicle registration, construction permitting, and school operations.

The important role of local government in serving the general public comes to a halt when public employees strike. A public right to strike may constitute an unconstitutional delegation of government powers, transferring to the striking worker and/or union all legislative, executive, and judicial power. A strike can paralyze a town or city, removing decision making authority from the elected representatives of the public and, by extension, the public itself.

These are among the many reasons Maine has not generally bestowed the right to strike upon public employees. As a matter of not only public health and safety but, importantly, civic responsibility, this legislation ought not pass.