



## Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association (MMA)

### Neither For Nor Against

### *LD 3, An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program*

December 20, 2022

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President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Kate Dufour, and I am submitting testimony “neither for nor against” LD 3 on behalf of the 70 municipal leaders who were elected by their peers to serve on the Association’s Legislative Policy Committee and directed to establish MMA’s position on bills of municipal interest.

MMA is offering “neither for nor against” testimony on LD 3, as there is an element of the initiative municipal officials support, one that causes some concern, and an observation regarding a third section of the bill municipal officials offer for your consideration.

**Support.** Municipal officials support Part A of LD 3 appropriating \$71 million to supplement existing heating and emergency housing assistance programs.

Not only will an investment of this nature protect Maine’s most vulnerable residents, but it may also diminish the risks to public health and safety that arise when residents revert to nontraditional and unsafe means for heating their homes when resources are unavailable.

Additionally, over the last several months, communities of varying populations in all areas of Maine have experienced increases in requests for financial support through the General Assistance (GA) program. The concern among municipal leaders is that the onset of the cold weather season combined with increasing fuel costs will shift additional tax burdens onto other property owners facing similar heating and financial challenges. This appropriation will reduce some of the pressure placed on GA programs, which are funded, in part, with property tax revenues.

**Concern.** Some municipal officials raised issues with the provision found in Part E of the bill authorizing the Department of Environmental Protection, under prescribed circumstances, to suspend the sulfur content requirements for liquid and solid fossil fuels, without public comment. The concern among these officials is with the unintended adverse impacts this policy could have on the environment. At the very least, proposed amendments to sulfur content levels should benefit from public input.

**Observation.** While municipal officials believe the Legislature is better suited to determine the standards of eligibility for the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program established in Part B of the bill, a subset of municipal officials believe the income limits should be adjusted to better target the relief to those in greatest need and toward programs designed to provide direct heating and housing assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the municipal perspective on LD 3. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [kdufour@memun.org](mailto:kdufour@memun.org) or 1-800-452-8786.