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## Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

### In Opposition to

### *LD 1123, An Act to Create a Presumption That a Cardiovascular Injury or Disease or Pulmonary Disease Suffered by Certain Law Enforcement Officers Is in the Course of Employment*

April 6, 2023

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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Kate Dufour, and I am submitting testimony in opposition to LD 1123 on behalf of the 70 municipal leaders elected by their peers to serve on the Association's Legislative Policy Committee and directed to establish positions on bills of municipal interest.

Municipal leaders appreciate the services provided by municipal law enforcement agencies and recognize the pressures that the provision of public safety services places on these men and women and the related toll on their personal health and wellness. To suggest otherwise is an absolute fallacy. Municipal officials know full well that consistent exposure to negative events is associated with elevated suicide risks, and early onset cardiac disease which often occurs earlier in life and outside the cardiac disease screening available to the general population.

While it will be easy for supporters of the initiative to paint the municipal opposition with the broad stroke of a disinterest in the health of their employees, state policies that support waiting until a law enforcement officer suffers an injury before putting into place a presumption of injury is of great concern. Simply delaying access to appropriate preventive care and shifting burdens onto the property taxpayers will not resolve the underlying issue.

Rather than turning to costly presumptions of workplace disability, injury or death, the legislature should collaborate with municipal government partners to fund and implement proactive healthcare programs that are uniquely designed to monitor the health of individuals who routinely operate within high stress environments.

To that end, MMA has a solution.

At the request of its Legislative Policy Committee, this session the Association has advanced a yet-to-be-printed bill, *An Act To Create The Public Safety Health and Wellness Fund To Benefit Public Safety Workers and Volunteers*. This legislation establishes a statewide reimbursement fund to offset the cost of providing public safety employees, including volunteer first responders, access to a specially designed health and wellness program that mitigates both

the physical and mental health effects that the repeated exposure to traumatic events has on these professionals.

Specifically, the proposal allows public safety agencies to receive reimbursement for the costs of providing informed mental health, wellness, and specialized cardiac screening for risk factors unique to public safety employees. Additionally, the initiative directs that the services be available to all levels of law enforcement including reserve employees and allows the use of telehealth services where necessary and practical. Finally, 5% of the gross sales and excise tax revenue generated by adult use cannabis establishments in Maine is used to fund this program.

This approach presents a tremendous opportunity for the state to collaborate with municipal partners to address this issue before it is too late. The legislature could fund these preventive measures at a fraction of the cost of the presumption proposed in LD 1123 and achieve the very thing this bill cannot; that is, improved health for the very public employees who deal with individuals at their most vulnerable stages.

Absent a state level willingness to act proactively, municipal officials ask that the legislature appropriate the revenues necessary to reimburse municipalities for 100% of the cost associated with implementing this mandate and establish a statewide pool to guarantee the delivery payment for career and life ending events uniformly across the state.

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective. If you have questions about the Association's testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at 1-800-452-8786 or [kdufour@memun.org](mailto:kdufour@memun.org).