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Testimony of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

In support of LD 2152, *An Act to Allow Equitable Compensation of Certain Board Members*

Sponsor: Representative Dhalac
Hearing Date: January 25, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Ian Yaffe, and I serve as the Director of the Office for Family Independence in the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2152, *An Act to Allow Equitable Compensation of Certain Board Members*.

This straightforward bill would authorize (though not require) a Department to provide reasonable compensation for participation on advisory boards that are excluded by definition in 5 MRS §12002, such as "any informal advisory organization established exclusively by a state agency to advise the commissioner or director of that agency on an informal basis." This compensation is entirely at the discretion of the department or agency convening the group and would be within existing resources.

This small change would allow greater accessibility to these advisory councils for individuals who may not be able to take a day off from their business or work to participate and offer their perspective unless they are compensated.

As an example, the Department of Health and Human Services' plan to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion set forth a long-term commitment to addressing health disparities and increasing department collaboration with impacted communities. The Department constituted a pilot Health Equity Council to collaborate with the Department and provide input from the impacted community into the Department's policies and programs; however, the Controller's Office advised that the Department did not have existing authority to provide even minimal compensation for Council members. This has been a barrier for participation, and this is only the most recent example.

Following this experience, DHHS is proposing this bill to allow this flexibility when and if DHHS and other agencies deem appropriate and feasible within existing resources. I hope you will support LD 2152 to ensure all constituencies can be represented.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I will be glad to answer any questions that I can and make myself or members of our team available for the work session.