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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association (MMA)

In Support of Part C & Neither For Nor Against Part W of

LD 2214, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

February 21, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kate Dufour, and I am submitting written testimony in support of Part C and “neither for nor against” Part W of LD 2214 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.

Part C. With respect to Part C of the supplemental budget, municipal leaders are pleased that once again Governor Mills’ budget honors the State’s commitment to fund 55% of the cost of K-12 education, as calculated by the Essential Programs and Services model.

By honoring this commitment, the property tax revenues that would have otherwise been allocated for K-12 education can either be used to reduce local tax burdens or invested in programs and services of value to residents. As those who have served at the town or city level as an appointed official, elected officer or a volunteer member of a budget committee understand, it is often the case that funding for county and school services has the impact of reducing investments in municipal services in an effort to contain overall mil rate increases.

Part W. The LPC’s “neither for nor against” position on Part W, which seeks to transition the provision of educational services for children ages three to five with disabilities to all school administrative units (SAU), is based on both appreciation and concern over the proposal.

With respect to the positives, municipal leaders understand the importance of continuity in the provision of educational services and the need to do what is best for all students. While the current model may work for some, the disruption that occurs when students transition from private education to a public school can have adverse impact on the student’s educational path. It is important that all students have the tools necessary to succeed, which is what Part W intends to do.

Municipal officials also appreciate that the proposal allows for a transition period for SAUs to prepare for the added functions and provides SAUs that are ready to implement the program as early as this year with additional state support. Part W also enables districts to enter into a memorandum of understanding for the provision of the soon to be required educational services and provides for 100% state reimbursement for the new expenditures, as calculated by EPS model, most importantly, outside of the regular appropriation for general-purpose aid for education.

The lingering concern among municipal officials is how other related expenses will be covered, especially the costs associated with adapting facilities, finding the space necessary to house growing student populations, and the cost of hiring additional staff. The pressures currently placed on the property taxpayers to fund local government services, including counties and schools, as well as to comply with unfunded state mandates, are already too high. For that reason, municipal leaders are asking the Legislature to fully fund this important program.

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective on these issues. If you have any questions about the Association's position on these provisions of the supplemental budget bill, please do not hesitate to contact me at kdufour@memun.org or 1-800-452-8786.