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Follow-Up Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association (MMA)

LD 209, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025

Neither For Nor Against Part S – General Assistance

January 31, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name in Amanda Campbell and I am submitting testimony Neither For Nor Against Part S of LD 209 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association’s 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) is tasked with debating and voting on positions for bills with a municipal impact.

As proposed in Part S, unless it is used to fund temporary housing or emergency shelters and for certain hardships, General Assistance applicants are limited to three months of housing assistance and 30 days of aid, over the maximums allowed, for all other non-housing-related living expenses during a 12-month period. Under the current law, provided applicants meet all eligibility requirements, there is no limit on the number of months in which aid can be provided. However, there is a limit on the value of the assistance provided, which is calculated according to the formula found in Title 22, §4305.

Municipal officials understand and appreciate the need for the State to make tough decisions to ensure the implementation of an appropriately funded and balanced budget. We also recognize that the proposed amendment seeks to return GA to its historic “program of last resort” status. This proposed change will certainly reduce both state and local costs, but at what human cost? Several questions have been raised by members that staff are unable to answer.

The currently unknown fate of applicants needing housing assistance beyond the three-month period has caused municipal officials to question the “Plan B” housing solution. Will those applicants become unhoused in a currently volatile housing market when homelessness has already been identified as a chronic issue? With the pause in federal vouchers and the state eviction prevention program implemented last session already boasting a waiting list, what is Plan B? Increasing the population of unhoused

individuals and families by discontinuing housing assistance for people who are already housed will create significant unintended consequences and will create a ripple effect on to shelters, hospitals and law enforcement agencies. This simply shifts financial responsibility instead of cutting costs.

Most municipal officials will agree that reforms to the General Assistance program are necessary. Although times have changed since the program's inception and basic "program of last resort" status, those changes should be interpreted and constructively utilized to create a program that is effective and sustainable instead of implementing severe restrictions with no fail safe in mind for the people who will be impacted the most.

Thank you for your patience while the Association came to an official position on this section of Governor Mills' FY 25 Supplemental Budget. Thank you for your consideration of the municipal perspective on this important state-mandated and locally provided program. Please feel free to contact me or any member of the MMA Advocacy team with any questions relating to municipal operations.