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## **Testimony for LD 1 An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes and Infrastructure**

Good afternoon Chairman Curry and Chairwoman Gere and the distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Art Cleaves and I am the director of the York County Emergency Management Agency in Alfred, ME. Today, I am here to speak in support of LD1.

My experience spans all levels of emergency management—local, state, and federal—which has given me a comprehensive understanding of how our emergency management system functions. I first started in Emergency Management at the State of Maine, serving as Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency under Governors King and Baldacci. After my time at MEMA, I became the FEMA Region 1 Director, overseeing federal emergency management efforts for all of New England. Since 2014, I have been the director of the York County Emergency Management Agency, where I have earned an appreciation for the efforts done locally by my agency and the 29 municipalities we support every day.

I appreciate the committee's focus on this bill as a way to make Maine better prepared for the disasters we will face in the future.

If there is one thing all my experience has taught me is this: all emergencies begin and end at the local level. I'll repeat: all emergencies begin and end at the local level.

When disaster strikes, it is the local emergency management agencies, first responders, and local officials who are on the front lines. It is our communities that feel the immediate impact, and it is within our jurisdictions that the initial response occurs. This fundamental principle underscores the importance of a strong and well-supported local emergency management system.

Maine is unique in New England in that county emergency management plays a critical role in coordinating and supporting the local emergency response framework. These county agencies maintain strong partnerships at all levels of government and strengthen the overall resilience of communities. In York County, 28 of the 29 local emergency management directors have EMA as their secondary duty. This makes our county EMA essential as we have the vast majority of full-time EMA positions at the local level. With full-time staff, York County's emergency management ensures that smaller jurisdictions within the county receive the necessary guidance, resources, and training to effectively prepare for and respond to emergencies. In the recovery process, county governments also have the unique ability to help municipalities by procuring services on their behalf. This cost-saving action allows for municipal resources to be used more efficiently and allows the county government to use its resources to aid in the recovery process.

In times of major disasters, the state emergency management agency serves as an essential conduit between the local level and federal resources. They provide coordination and access to resources not available at the local level. However, the backbone of emergency management remains rooted at the local level. The effectiveness of emergency response efforts depends on ensuring that local emergency management offices are adequately resourced, trained, and empowered to fulfill their mission.

My goal in providing this testimony is to take a strong position on this bill, as this legislation is a step in the right direction. Any legislative changes should recognize the central role of local and county emergency management and prioritize strengthening local capabilities. This includes ensuring funding mechanisms that directly benefit local and county agencies, fostering training and preparedness initiatives, and reinforcing coordination efforts that enhance the partnerships between all levels of government.

I urge this committee to ensure that any policy changes or funding allocations derived from this bill reflect the reality that emergency response starts locally. Enhancing the capacity of local and county emergency management agencies ultimately leads to stronger, more resilient communities and a more effective statewide emergency management system.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.