

Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1072 – An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Land for Maine's Future Program and to Authorize the Use of Options to Purchase at Agricultural Value

March 27, 2025

Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Pluecker and distinguished members of the Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am providing testimony in neither for nor against LD 1072, at the direction of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). Our LPC is made up of individuals from across Maine with municipal officials elected by their peers across Maine's 35 Senate districts representing communities with very different access to available enforcement resources and local capacity.

The Land For Maine's Future program has been important for communities who desire to keep spaces that would otherwise find a higher value use, and instead keep special lands available for the common use of everyone. However, it is not without a significant burden on the host community, particularly when the land is removed from the tax assessment rolls and the gap is shifted to other residential property owners. In some areas of the state like Washington County, this has created a real problem for residential owners on fixed incomes and at the lowest income levels of the state who must make up the gap, with little ability to do so. While many trust partners continue to keep lands in current use taxation programs, others do not and the inconsistency of this process grows negativity towards only one type of untaxed ownership of property, when there are many state allowed exemptions that are equally adding to the local tax burden.

It is for this reason that officials would like the committee to be aware of the concerns municipalities have regarding the proposed amendments particularly in **Sec. A-8. 5 MRSA §6206-A, Public notice of final award.** As drafted, the bill removes notice to owners and abutters with inclusion of parcel maps and limits public notices to websites and newspapers alone. Communities need much more notice and engagement in this process, and the former notice requirements, while cumbersome, provide a bare minimum of communication to the neighborhood and the affected community. Officials ask that the committee strengthen the notification section to include holding one public meeting in the community where the land is intended to be purchased as part of the process for the final award, consider retaining abutter notice, and consider the property tax impact on the community as part of the final process to ensure the use of state funds to remove land from local tax rolls is not adversely impacting the host community.

While officials agree these programs are vital for protecting access and vulnerable natural resources and likely will become more important to address climate change impacts, they feel this is an opportunity to improve the program and address impacts that drive bills presented to the legislature each session attempting to limit trust lands, when they are only one high profile state exempted program

impacting property tax assessment. Thank you for your work and efforts to consider ways to improve the current process.