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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against

LD 1659 – An Act to Raise Revenue to Fund Firefighting Equipment Purchases and Training Related to Electric Vehicle Fires Through a Fee on Electric Vehicles

April 30, 2025

Sen. Nangle, Rep. Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am submitting testimony neither for nor against to LD 1659 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.

Officials appreciate all efforts to provide funding that is achievable for every fire department regardless of their size and low barrier gear grants to make sure capacity to afford new fire fighting technology is not a barrier for any community. That said, EV's are only part of the fire fighting challenges facing Maine's public safety services. Battery technology in general has become a significant cause of fires including batteries for power tools, lawn equipment and our own personal devices.

The Department of Energy's Alternative Fuels Data Center reports that Maine saw 7,400 electric vehicles and 7,600 plug in hybrid electric vehicle registrations in 2023 based on their collection of light duty vehicles registration counts. That would have provided \$3.7 million in funds based on the \$250 fee model posed in LD 1659. Those funds are desperately needed by fire departments not only to respond appropriately to vehicle fires, but also all other types of fires including those caused by batteries more generically.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) free personal protective equipment that prevents the gear fire fighters need to protect themselves in all fire also limits their exposure to known cancer causing chemicals. However, this gear is extremely expensive and is often phased in costing \$4,000- \$6,000 for outer gear alone, and each fire fighter needs two sets generally. If the committee decides to move forward with this proposal, it is vital that the funds are able to be used for more than just material used to extinguish the fire, but also materials necessary to protect the responder. EV fires frequently reignite, release a wide range of harmful chemicals and take considerably more time to extinguish making safer personal protection gear even more important.

Officials ask that you consider these additional points as you deliberate how to address the growing need to fight chemical fires resulting from new technologies and the role of EV sales in supporting solutions.