

Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition To

LD 1568 – *An Act to Allow the Use of a Siren in a Vehicle Used by a Harbor Master or Deputy Harbor Master*

May 1, 2025

Sen. Nangle, Rep. Crafts, and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am submitting testimony in opposition to LD 1568 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.

As drafted, the bill would allow the addition of a siren to a personal vehicle operated by a harbor master or deputy harbor master and permit its use when responding to a watercraft emergency. A siren is currently not possible to be placed in a personal vehicle with good reason as it increases the level of risk incurred by a municipality for operation and actions that are outside the scope of municipal control such as damage to a personal vehicle occurring during a response which is increased when the vehicle operated is not easily identifiable as an emergency response vehicle.

Additionally, vehicles with lights installed are not allowed to exceed the posted speed limit and the installation of a siren with lights is generally necessary when a response is at a higher rate of speed. Harbor masters are not all fully certified law enforcement officers with emergency vehicle operation training and usually trained to a lower green pin level. Emergency vehicle operation training is an important skill that in part preserves the public safety of others who are in the path of response.

While municipal officials appreciate the permissive aspects of the bill, the current restriction in place affords them the ability to make sure any emergency response is in a clearly identifiable public safety vehicle with regular maintenance and with clear municipal purpose. As drafted, officials will be pressured to accept the liability of operation in personal vehicles that may cost far more to repair than a basic municipal vehicle and lack any markings that would provide confidence for other operators that yielding to a non-standard vehicle with lights and siren is for a genuine emergency purpose. This is also important because secondary accidents occurring from yielding to emergency response vehicles are frequent and adds to municipal liability.

For all of these reasons, officials ask the committee to consider the significant pressure that will be placed on officials to approve these additional installations in personal vehicles and recognize that approving this for harbor masters will increase the likelihood that fire fighters and police officers will submit similar legislation in the future. Officials believe this type of emergency equipment may be better suited for installation in municipally owned, maintained, and clearly marked vehicles and require additional training that is not part of the current certification process.