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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support of

LD 1681 - An Act to Consider Municipal Shelter Facilities and Housing Projects Essential for Public Health, Welfare and Safety by Updating the Definition of "Public Service Infrastructure"

May 2, 2025

Sen. Curry, Rep. Gere and distinguished members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1681, at the direction of MMA's Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). Our LPC is composed of municipal officials from across Maine, elected by their peers to represent communities with vastly different enforcement staff, resources and capacities. We are grateful for Rep. Lookner's willingness to advance solutions that help all municipalities with their needs and LD 1681 is an opportunity to change language that lifts all municipalities and meet all housing challenges limited by existing housing incentives.

Municipal officials appreciate the inclusion of municipal shelter facilities and housing projects managed and operated by a municipality of municipally affiliated housing authority to the statute. This change will broaden the available tools to address significant challenges facing service center communities who must compete for inadequate funding that is also allocated to projects of narrow scope.

These changes would allow a community who has resident desire to bond for a "workforce" housing project to be able use well known tools for municipal finance to achieve their goals. Permanent municipally owned homes allow rent receipts to return to their upkeep and bond payment and increase the opportunities for the public service workforce.

The use of real estate as a portfolio investment hollows out communities and prices permanent residents away from the areas of the state that provide the economic engine benefiting the general fund directly. Communities along the coast are challenged to find employees for the exact services Maine markets to visitors daily. Elderly residents in those communities are challenged to find space in supportive facilities, hospitals lack staff that don't constantly revolve, and towns are unable to find new municipal and school employees. This bill would help municipalities to invest in the human infrastructure that drives Maine's economy, allowing communities to invest long term the same way they do for other vital public service infrastructure and lack the ability to compete for the finite funds and complex programs on offer now.

For all of these reasons, officials respectfully ask you to support LD 1681.