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Maine Mayors Coalition Testimony on LD 1996 An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws Governing General Assistance

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, the Maine Mayors Coalition is providing testimony in opposition to LD 1996, An Act to Clarify Responsibilities of the State in the Laws Governing General Assistance.

The Maine Mayors Coalition is a nonpartisan group representing the mayors of eleven Maine communities – Auburn, Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston, Portland, Rockland, Saco, Sanford, South Portland, Waterville and Westbrook – and nearly 300,000 residents. The Coalition advocates on behalf of our citizens and municipalities for policies that recognize the vital services Maine cities provide and the positive impact Maine cities have on our state. The Coalition seeks to work in partnership with state and federal elected officials to meet the needs of Maine people.

Our most immediate concerns are providing essential support and housing to people who are in need. As you're well aware, Maine's General Assistance program provides a lifeline for many who find themselves in dire financial situations. Over the last several years, more people than ever are relying on the GA program due to the lack of housing supply, costs of homes and rents, and prices for food, clothing, energy and other essentials. We do not expect this need to subside for some time.

Like the state as a whole, our cities have experienced significant increases in GA applicants and costs. For us, these growing numbers place additional burdens on our municipal budgets and staffs as well as on our ability to provide other critical services. Yet, our GA administrators continue to make every effort to process applications as quickly as possible so our citizens do not go without basic necessities.

Over the years, GA administrators from across the state made the case to the Health and Human Services Committee that they would be more efficient and effective if they had access to a statewide database. This Committee and the Legislature responded in 2024 by enacting a law requiring the Department of Health and Human Services develop a database and provide municipalities with access to it by July 1, 2025. According to the Department, proposals exceeded the budget and adequate funding has not been available to proceed.

Since the Legislature determined a statewide database was necessary enough to include in statute and given the continuing requests for one, we ask that you vote ought not to pass on LD 1996. Rather than eliminating the potential for developing such essential infrastructure, please consider amending the implementation date to such a time when the database can be adequately funded.

Thank you for your time.