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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against LD 1426, *An Act to Secure Housing for the Most Vulnerable Maine Residents by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal General Assistance*

May 5, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee My name is Kate Dufour, and I am testifying neither for nor against LD 1426 on behalf of the 70 municipal leaders elected by their peers to serve on the Association's Legislative Policy Committee and directed to establish positions on bills of municipal interest

In the category of great minds think alike, municipal officials support sections 4 through 7 of the bill, as the proposed changes mirror the provisions found in LD 1732, which was advanced by Rep Meyer on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association

However, local leaders do have concerns with the remaining provisions of the bill

Training. Municipal officials do not object to the training mandate but would ask the committee to further amend the language to direct the Department of Health and Human Services to make the training available at no cost to municipalities and accessible either in-person, online or via a prerecorded video This change would help offset the costs of the mandate

Calculation of Maximum. Municipal officials support the provision of the bill seeking to amend the way in which the maximum level of assistance is calculated However, simply directing municipalities to do so is not entirely helpful as it places additional burdens on the property taxpayers who are left to bear the cost of administering the program without any state reimbursement Instead, the department should be directed to calculate the maximum levels of assistance annually and to disseminate that information to municipalities in a timely fashion

Period of Eligibility. While municipal leaders appreciate that authority to provide up to a year's worth of rental assistance is voluntary, there is nothing in the bill to safeguard municipalities from a state level claw back of reimbursement should a recipient become ineligible for assistance during the year While the ability to provide assistance over a longer period of time could serve as a tool for ensuring the acquisition of permanent housing, without provisions in statutes to protect municipalities, the investment may present too high of a risk or too large a financial burden for property taxpayers to shoulder

MMA is available and willing to work with the Committee, sponsors and interested parties to develop consensus on the best path forward

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective on this issue If you have any questions about the Association's position on this bill, please do not hesitate to contact me at kdufour@memun.org or 1-800-452-8786