



## Department of the Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows  
Secretary of State

### JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State  
Department of the Secretary of State

*March 1, 2024*

Testifying in Support

L.D. 2214, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

Senators Rotundo and Nangle, Representatives Sachs and Stover, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and State and Local Government, my name is Shenna Bellows, and I am the Secretary of State. I am here today to present testimony in support of those items presented in the 2024 Supplemental Budget for the Department of the Secretary of State.

There is one General Fund Initiative beginning on page **A-127** of the **Budget Document**.

#### **Administration – Archives 0050**

1. Establishes one Management Analyst I position to serve as a Local Government Records Manager and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$89,044 in FY2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$11,207 in FY2024-25**.

This position will serve as the Local Government Records Manager. Local Government records differ from state records in their use and complexity. The Maine State Archives is statutorily required to issue records retention schedules and provide guidance for local government records management but does not currently have anyone on staff dedicated to assisting county or municipal governments and school systems with their records management needs. The Maine State Archives has only two other records management staff members to manage all state agency records needs in addition to serving local government. This staff person is needed to provide direct, expert support as well as training throughout the state.

There are 7 General Fund initiatives beginning on page **A-128** of the **Budget Document**. Please note initiatives 1,2,3,5 and 7 are Elections related and also fall under the jurisdiction of the Veterans and

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Legal Affairs Committee. Initiatives 4 and 6 are within the sole jurisdiction of the State and Local Government Committee.

### **Bureau of Administrative Services and Corporations 0692**

1. Provides funding for voter education materials. The All Other request is **\$10,000 in FY2023-24.**

This initiative funds various voter education materials that include the Citizen's Guide, "I Voted" stickers, posters and other materials needed to distribute to clerks to promote voter turnout for the 2024 elections. In an election year where we are implementing several significant new policies - semi-open primaries, online voter registration, and on-going absentee – it will be critical for the elections division to provide clerks with the necessary posters and materials, so the public is aware of these changes while at their town office of polling place.

2. Provides funding for software licenses and maintenance expenses for a rule making application and database to facilitate efficiency and accessibility of agency rulemaking across agencies statewide. The All Other request is **\$50,000 in FY2023-24 and \$150,000 in FY2024-25.**

This initiative provides funding for software to manage agency rulemaking and facilitate better public access. The proposed software would include multi-agency access and permissions, workflow management, status management, sensitive data management and archiving, notifications and reminders, and public view. This initiative aligns with my office's goal of modernizing our processes and systems in order to enable agencies to track rulemaking more closely and allow the public to easily navigate rules open to public comment as well as the finalized rules.

3. Provides funding for software licenses and maintenance expenses for a Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) request application and database to facilitate public records requests. The All Other request is **\$20,585 in FY2023-24 and \$14,585 in FY2024-25.**

This initiative provides funding for a single-solution approach to fulfilling public records requests and manage appeals in a timely manner. In the last four years our office has seen a significant increase in the number of FOAA requests, with the vast majority of the requests seeking records related to elections. Given the current political climate, we foresee these requests continuing to increase in volume and breadth. Prompt and thorough fulfillment of public records requests related to elections is a cornerstone of public trust in elections. Our current processes without the appropriate tools results in hundreds of hours of manual review of thousands of pages to make determinations on whether something does or does not fall under the public records statute. Oftentimes, FOAA requests and the subsequent research processes are duplicative. This new software is designed to track requests from receipt through completion and to facilitate public access to those requests; the solution will reduce staff hours dedicated to FOAA requests and increase public trust.

4. Provides funding for leased space to relocate the Division of Corporations, Uniform Commercial Code and Commissions staff. The All Other request is **\$253,294 in FY2024-25.** Current office space for Elections and for the Corporations, UCC and Commissions staff is insufficient. This initiative seeks to provide funding for office space outside of the Burton M. Cross Office Building and provide funding for the related relocation expenses for the Division of Corporations.

5. Establishes one Office Specialist II Position and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$95,165 in FY2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$11,207 in FY2024-25**.

This initiative provides funding for a dedicated administrative position to serve as a person of contact for visitors and to process incoming large volume of phone calls to the elections division. Currently, this function is provided by Corporations, Uniform Commercial Code, and Commissions staff, but since there is not sufficient space at the Burton M. Cross Office Building – where these two divisions share office space – Corporations is relocating to a different building with the corresponding staff and won't be able to staff the election division reception window. Given the frequent number of calls and visitors coupled with the immense demands on the elections division staff, they do not have capacity to assign a current member of the staff – or even rotate staff - to fill this role. A devoted Office Specialist II position is vital to ensure timely services for member of the public, candidates, political parties and clerks and ensures that elections staff can concentrate on their ongoing roles and responsibilities.

6. Establishes three Office Specialist II positions and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$257,970 in FY2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$33,622 in FY2024-25**.

The workload over the past ten years has increased substantially while headcount has not. Last year, the Division of Corporations handled about 18,000 new filings as well as over 19,000 changes to current entities. Since 2019, there has been an overall increase in over 40% of new formation and amendment filings and over the last 10 years there has been an 82% increase in the total number of entities on the record. While this is welcomed news for Maine businesses and our state's economy, the serious increase has also resulted in an unprecedented high volume of work. To address this challenge to support Maine's business community, the Division has employed three temporary contracted workers and authorized voluntary emergency overtime by Corporations staff. The requested positions would replace the temporary workers and provide a more stable workforce.

7. Establishes one Public Service Coordinator I position and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$112,823 in FY2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$11,207 in FY2024-25**.

This initiative provides funding for a position to serve as the Public Information Officer and Freedom of Access Act Officer dedicated to elections. The position will ensure that all information used by the public on elections forms, letters, brochures, pamphlets, website content and social media posts is consistent, accurate and up to date. This position will ensure the prompt and thorough fulfillments of records requests for thousands of pages of elections records annually. This position will also compose responses to inquiries about voting and elections that are received daily by the Elections Division.

There is one Federally funded initiative on page A-129

### **Elections and Commissions 0693**

1. Establishes one limited-period Public Services Coordinator I position through August 31, 2026 to serve as an Election Security Navigator and provides funding for related All Other costs. The Personal Services request is **\$108,758 in FY 2024-25**. The All Other request is **\$41,242 in FY 2024-25**.

This initiative allocates funds from a federal grant already awarded for a position to serve as the Elections Security Navigator to aid municipalities in establishing cybersecurity protections for elections security. Because many municipalities have technological limitations, this position will support municipalities in identifying cybersecurity risks, cataloging networks and systems, and transitioning to the .gov domain to improve cybersecurity. The position will advise municipalities on the implementation of Elections Baseline Security controls and provide technical assistance and training to municipalities.

Additionally, there is one language request on page 76, Part GGG.

**Sec. GGG-1.** Carrying provision; Department of Secretary of State, Administration – Archives. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, at the end of fiscal year 2024-24, the State Controller shall carry forward up to \$1,500,000 appropriated for high-density shelving at the former Eastside Wellness Center and in the Cultural Building in the Maine State Archives as authorized in Public Law 2023, chapter 3 to fiscal year 2024-25 in the Administration – Archives program, General fund account, Capital Expenditures line category.

This funding for high density shelving in the Cultural Building was approved by the legislature in PL 2023, chapter 3. Due to construction delays into 2025, this funding is being carried forward for its intended purpose.

This concludes my testimony on the items included in the Governor's proposed FY 2024-2025 Supplemental budget. I would be happy to answer your questions now or at the work session. Thank you for your consideration.