

Testimony of Joe Legee, Deputy Director, Maine Emergency Management Agency

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND
FINANCIAL AFFAIRS WITH THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL
JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

LD 209, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025"

January 21, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, also, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. I am Joe Legee, Deputy Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency. I am here today to testify in support of the supplemental budget bill, LD 209.

I will begin with initiatives in PART A on page A-12.

The first initiative on the page is a management-initiated position reclassification; it was included in error as it has not yet been approved by Human Resources, it should be unincorporated and added in once it is approved.

The second initiative addresses a significant reduction in federal funding for the Maine Emergency Management Agency. Between federal fiscal year 2023 and 2024, the state received approximately \$836,000 less in key emergency preparedness grant funding. This decrease follows nearly a decade of flat federal funding and rising inflation, which have strained Agency resources. Without additional State funding, the Agency faces difficult decisions about which programs to reduce or eliminate, including State programs that provide training, update emergency plans, and develop hazard mitigation projects, or local programs funded by federal grant pass-through. The referenced State programs ensure that the Agency remains in compliance with statutory obligations to update the State's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and ensure that the state at large remains eligible for federal disaster assistance programs.

The third initiative provides funding for workers' compensation premiums for emergency management volunteers. Under Title 37-B, Section 784-A, the Maine Emergency Management Agency and local emergency management organizations may call on volunteers to assist with emergency management activities. These volunteers are considered state employees for liability protection and workers' compensation insurance. MEMA collaborates with county emergency managers to support more than 750 volunteers who contribute to critical emergency management activities, including:

- Hazardous materials response;
- Animal sheltering;
- Amateur radio operations;
- Tactical dispatch; and
- Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) support.

Funding for these premiums ensures the State can meet its legal obligation to provide workers' compensation insurance for volunteers performing these essential activities.

The last initiative on page A-12 for \$5 million focuses on funding the Disaster Recovery Fund to meet State cost-share requirements for disaster declarations. The State is required by law to participate in a cost share for declared disasters, up to, but not more than, 25%. Between March 2022 and May 2024, Maine experienced nine natural disasters severe enough to qualify for Presidential Disaster or Emergency Declarations. MEMA is currently managing grants for 11 open disasters, from a windstorm in fall 2017 to a severe winter storm in April 2024.

Sufficient funding for the Disaster Recovery Fund is essential to prevent delays in reimbursing municipalities and other eligible applicants. Without this funding, the state's cost-share reimbursement would be postponed, causing detrimental cash flow problems for small communities and nonprofits—particularly those impacted by multiple storms over a short period, such as happened for some Maine communities in the case of the December 2023 and January 2024 storms.

Finally, I will shift to our one initiative in PART F. This initiative proposes a permanent, \$3 million annual transfer to the year-end cascade, again for the Disaster Recovery Fund, to ensure communities receive state support without waiting for the next legislative session. Given the increased frequency and intensity of severe weather events, this proactive funding approach would streamline disaster recovery efforts and support the resilience of Maine's municipalities.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time. I am happy to address any questions either here or in the work session that follows.