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**Testimony of Brigadier General Diane Dunn, Adjutant General and Commissioner,
Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management**

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

LD 210, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027"

February 4, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Good afternoon also to Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

I am Diane Dunn, the Commissioner of the Department of Defense, Veterans, and Emergency Management and The Adjutant General. I am pleased to be here today to testify in strong support of the biennial budget bill, LD 210.

Maine – like many states, both blue and red – is facing a tight budget environment.

The budget presented is a balanced approach, a result of months spent carefully considering how to preserve the programs lawmakers and Maine people support. This budget invests in operating needs like technology efficiencies, health and safety improvements, and collective bargaining impacts. We know these proposals are difficult and appreciate that you will consider them open-mindedly.

The Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management (DVEM) is responsible for all military, veterans, and emergency management-related operations within the State of Maine. In addition to their Federal mission, our Soldiers and Airmen are immediately available to respond to the Governor and citizens of Maine in times of crisis. The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services provides numerous support services to

Maine's 108,000 veterans and manages the four Maine's Veterans' Memorial Cemeteries across the State. The Maine Emergency Management Agency is charged with all disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and Homeland Security operations within the State of Maine.

My testimony today will focus on the Maine Emergency Management Agency – this point forward referred to as MEMA.

As we see intense weather events sweep the nation – from Vermont and New Hampshire to the Carolinas and California – Maine also faces more frequent and severe storms. Our three seasons now include windstorms, winter storms, and flooding. Given changing conditions in our state, where dry soil is resulting in deeper burning wildfires, we may soon have to add wildfire to this list of “seasons”

Given these growing challenges, federal funding stagnation and cuts of over \$836,000 in FY 24, MEMA's ability to fulfill its mission is in jeopardy.

The focus of our 2026/2027 biennial budget requests will deliver greater operational continuity, support to emergency management volunteers, upgraded critical infrastructure, more effective utilization of existing personnel, and greater ability to predict flooding. Our request includes the transfer of eleven positions from federal expenditures to the General Fund, the continuation of three limited-period positions as permanent positions, and the addition of two disaster recovery positions and one mitigation position. In my remaining remarks, I will outline why these additions are required. MEMA has two vacancies that remain unfilled to make up for the deficit in federal funding.

I will address our budget in the order listed in the Public Hearing Testimony agenda.

Administration-Maine Emergency Management Agency program

I will begin on page A-167, Administration-Maine Emergency Management Agency program, which provides leadership, coordination, and support to lessen the effects of disaster on the people, property, and economy of Maine. It also provides guidance and assistance to county and local governments as well as other state agencies in their efforts to provide protection to citizens and property.

The first three initiatives focus on providing funding for and otherwise transferring core expenses, like rent, information technology, and other services from federal expenditures to the General Fund. These initiatives ensure that the Agency has sufficient funding to “keep the lights on” and administer critical emergency management programs to the citizens of Maine, despite the stagnant and reduced federal grant budget.

The next 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 next four initiatives focus on maintenance and replacement of the Agency's aging equipment, to ensure that MEMA can continue to meet local needs for assistance during disasters. These initiatives include funding for critical improvements to the State Emergency Operations Center and supporting workspaces, funding to support maintenance and replacement of Agency trailers and generators and funding to replace the Agency's prime mover – used to transport generators, shelter supplies, sandbags, and other materials to communities requesting support. These are one-time expenses aimed at sustaining Agency capabilities for the next 10-15 years.

The next ten initiatives transfer various Agency staff members from federal expenditures and reallocate them to the General Fund. These initiatives are the result of stagnant funding and cuts to critical federal preparedness grants. With the loss of federal funding, the State of Maine must provide additional funding, or MEMA will be faced with either cutting current program support and/or reducing the funding that the Agency passes through to local jurisdictions. Those familiar with emergency management will recognize the quote that, "all disasters start and end locally". In a system designed to be locally executed, state managed and federally supported – MEMA is seeking your assistance to ensure that the Agency can successfully manage local needs for both funding and assistance preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

The next two initiatives continue and make permanent three, existing limited-period positions at the Agency – one in mitigation and two in disaster recovery roles. These initiatives allow the Agency to manage the current and projected workload for these major grant programs and provide the Agency with the resources to bring more federal funding to Maine communities, faster.

The final two initiatives in this program establish an additional three headcount - two in disaster recovery and one in mitigation - to further expand the Agency's ability to

assist hundreds of Maine communities in their pursuit of public assistance and mitigation grant opportunities.

Emergency Response Operations

Our second program, Emergency Response Operations found on A-173, *funds the State Emergency Response Commission that is responsible for facilitating and coordinating the development of statewide plans for response to hazardous materials emergencies. This program* includes only one initiative, in alignment with those I've previously outlined, to transfer and reallocate staff from federal expenditures to the General Fund.

Stream Gaging Cooperative Program

Our final program, the Stream Gaging Cooperative Program, on page A-177, funds less than or equal to one-half of the United States Geological Survey's cost of flood monitoring, forecasting and warning on designated Maine streams and rivers.

Our two initiatives in this program focus on maintaining and expanding Maine's ability to predict the kind of flooding that we experienced just last year. Relative to other states, Maine has far fewer stream gauges, leaving some Maine communities vulnerable to rapidly changing flood conditions. The December 2023 storm is an all too recent example of this vulnerability. These initiatives provide funding to support the continued operation and maintenance of Maine's existing 11 streamflow gaging stations, 3 stage only gages, and 15 ground water gages, funding that has not increased since 2016, as well as funding to support additional stream gauges in the state to better predict flooding and provide other critical hydrologic information to local, state, and federal partners.

In the last year and a half, Maine has experienced a record-breaking five Presidentially Declared Disasters and one Emergency Declaration. Two of these disasters resulted in Individual Assistance declarations—an occurrence Maine had not seen in 16 years but has now experienced twice in consecutive months. MEMA is currently managing an unprecedented number of active declared disasters – 11 – and just recently closed number twelve. Each disaster represents hundreds of affected communities and projects spanning every corner of our state.

MEMA's Impact and Return on Investment

The funding and support received in the last biennium allowed MEMA to deliver outstanding results:

- **Managing up to twelve open disasters**, the most simultaneously in state history;
- **Funding generators in 60 municipalities** for critical facilities like fire stations and shelters;

- **Enhancing cybersecurity training and equipment** for schools and municipalities in partnership with Maine's Office of Information Technology;
- **Preparing ahead of the 2024 Solar Eclipse** to ensure the safety of tens of thousands of visitors;
- **Activating the State's Emergency Operations Center** ahead of major storms and disasters;
- **Passing through \$72.4 million in federal grants** to state and local partners in a single fiscal year; and
- **Securing national recognition for mitigation projects**, climbing from 37th to 8th in FEMA rankings.
- **Issued 26 emergency alerts** in response to life safety incidents across the state, including shelter in place and evacuation orders.

MEMA delivers a **7-to-1 return on investment for Maine**, bringing in over \$14.6 million in federal funding for every \$2 million in State funding.

With your support in fiscal years 2026 and 2027, MEMA will continue and expand our impact by:

- Remaining steadfast in our efforts to manage the 11 current open disasters, working hard to close them faster than new ones can arise, which means federal and state dollars back into Maine communities;
- Helping more Maine counties, municipalities, and non-profits prepare compelling applications for additional federal grant funding;
- Enhancing the State's Hazard Mitigation Plan to increase federal share in mitigation projects after disasters; and
- Ensuring that the State's response capabilities are robust and ready to meet our communities' needs on their worst day.

Conclusion

Through the combined efforts of state, county, and municipal partners, Maine has made great strides in tackling the complex, multi-hazard threats we now face. However, there is more work to be done to reduce the physical, psychological, and economic impact of future disasters and to prepare for catastrophic events that could challenge our entire state.

This budget is a necessary investment in ensuring that Maine remains prepared, resilient, and ready for whatever challenges come our way.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and support. I welcome any questions you may have and look forward to further discussions in the work session.