

Janet T. Mills
Governor
State of Maine
(207) 287-3531



Diane L. Dunn
Brigadier General
Commissioner
(207) 430-6000

**Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management
33 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0033**

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

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

**LD 1, " An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes
and Infrastructure"**

February 11, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Joe Legee, and I serve as the Deputy Director of the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). I am here today to testify in support of LD 1, a critical investment in Maine's emergency management and disaster recovery infrastructure.

Maine is facing a new era of storms and natural disasters, with severe consequences for our communities. Between March 2022 and May 2024, our state endured nine natural disasters severe enough to warrant Presidential Disaster or Emergency Declarations. These events underscore the urgent need to enhance our capacity to respond to and recover from emergencies, especially at a time when the future of federal disaster support is uncertain. LD1 would help meet this critical need.

Starting with investment in communications - effective communication before, during, and after emergencies is crucial—and yet, it remains one of the most challenging aspects of disaster management. Delays or inaccuracies in disseminating information can have severe consequences and attract significant scrutiny.

MEMA oversees the implementation of FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), which allows for the transmission of Wireless Emergency Alerts to all mobile devices within a specific area without requiring prior user registration. Unlike subscription-based systems, IPAWS ensures universal reach.

The investment outlined in LD 1, PART B, would enable substantial improvements to Maine's emergency communications system, including:

- Expanding the number of public officials authorized to issue alerts;

- Adding more languages to better serve Maine’s population; and
- Enhancing the targeting of alerts to ensure the alert reaches those that need to see it, without alerting those outside of the affected area.

These improvements will ensure the public receives the right information at the right time.

Moving on to investment into hazard mitigation – the frequency and intensity of storms and floods over the past two years have revealed significant gaps in Maine’s ability to navigate complex, widespread, and prolonged disaster recovery efforts. We must build a dedicated capacity to proactively mitigate risks, enhance resilience, and streamline recovery efforts.

The proposed funding in LD 1, PART B would enable MEMA to:

- Build the workforce needed to support both risk reduction during fair weather and recovery activities after disasters;
- Strengthen Maine’s competitiveness for federal grants, such as FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program; and
- Leverage funding from initiatives like the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund to support large-scale infrastructure projects.

This investment is essential to ensuring Maine is better prepared for future disasters.

Finally, LD 1 PART B proposes **\$10 million** to bolster the Disaster Recovery Fund. This funding is critical to meet the State’s legal obligation to cover up to 15% of costs for federally declared disasters.

Without adequate funding, reimbursements to municipalities and nonprofits would be delayed, causing cash flow challenges—particularly for small communities that have faced multiple disasters over just these last couple of years.

Timely funding ensures that communities can recover more effectively and reduces the financial strain on local governments and nonprofits.

In closing, these investments represent a necessary and forward-looking commitment to Maine’s resilience and disaster readiness. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.