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AARP Maine testimony in support of LD 1 An Act to Increase Storm Preparedness for Maine's Communities, Homes and Infrastructure

Greetings Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Bridget Quinn, Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine.

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. On behalf of our nearly 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today. Today I am testifying in support of LD 1.

We are supportive of LD 1 and the goals to better protect Mainers and better prepare Maine for inevitable storm disasters. Storm and disasters have historically had a disproportionate impact on older adults. In fact, Although people age 75 or older made up about 6 percent of the population in the city of New Orleans in 2005, they accounted for 50 percent of those who died that year as a result of Hurricane Katrina.¹ When Hurricane Ian struck Florida in 2022, of the 87 people killed by the storm, and for whom an age or approximate age was released, 61 were at least 60 years old. Eighteen of them were in their 80s, and five were in their 90s.

There are number of reasons older adults are disproportionately effected by storms and weather disasters. Older adults often have mobility difficulties that make it harder to get out of harm's way, may lack access to transportation or the support of loved ones nearby.

Failure of comprehensive communications planning may leave older adults out of receiving critical updates. For example, older adults without a cell phone or internet access lack an essential information and communications resource in this online era. According to AARP's 2021 Tech Trends report, 15 percent of people age 50 or older do not have access to any type of internet service, and 60 percent say the cost of high-speed internet is a problem. As a result, many older people are unable to get real-time information about changing weather or emergency conditions, available resources or how to find help.

¹ The Impact of Disasters on Older Adults <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2022/disaster-risks-to-older-adults.html?msocid=39a41e8c7aba6d752f7d0cad7bc46c4a>

Further, financial constraints may impact older adults' ability to prepare or respond to extreme weather. Those relying on social security have a limited income to prepare or respond to storms. However, LD 1 begins to address some of these key issues. We do want to ensure that this committee and the legislature however continue to understand the unique needs of older adults as you consider LD 1. As a joint FEMA and AARP resource identifies "building resilience begins with becoming aware of the range of older adults' needs and concerns."

As you have heard Part A of this bill creates the Home Resiliency Program which will provide grants to homeowners for the purpose of performing home resiliency projects. This program is vital to older adults who will wish to age in place in preparing their homes for today's needs but have a limited income. The availability of home resiliency grants will be critical for some of our most vulnerable Mainers.

LD 1 also highlights initiatives to improve statewide emergency communications systems. Again, it is critical to highlight the unique needs of some older adults who cannot access the internet. Maine's emergency communications systems must be extensive and accessible to all Mainers. This bill also establishes the State Resilience Office. As this office is established we look forward to the opportunity to continue to highlight the unique needs of older Mainers who must be considered in resiliency planning.

LD 1 provides critical infrastructure and funding to help Mainers prepare for disasters, we urge this committee to support LD 1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. If you have any questions for me I can be reached at bquinn@aarp.org.

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