



MAINE RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

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To: Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and
Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
State and Local Government

From: Bradley Sawyer, Deputy Director

Date: February 28, 2025

Re: In Support of L.D. 210, Section 0699

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and State and Local Government thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Brad Sawyer, and I am the Deputy Director of the Maine Rural Water Association.

The Maine Rural Water Association (MRWA) is a member-driven nonprofit organization based in Richmond, dedicated to providing training, technical assistance, and advocacy on behalf of our approximately three hundred members. The majority of our membership consists of water and wastewater utilities from across the state, all of whom are deeply committed to ensuring clean, safe drinking water and protecting the environment through the proper treatment of wastewater. MRWA plays a crucial role in supporting water and wastewater utilities across the state of Maine, offering a wide range of services aimed at ensuring safe, efficient, and sustainable water management. Our mission is to empower rural communities by offering essential resources and expertise that help maintain the quality and reliability of their water systems. Through our dedicated team of specialists, MRWA delivers hands-on assistance and education, tailored to the unique needs of Maine's rural utilities.

Maine Rural Water receives a General Fund Appropriation which is administered by the Maine Municipal Bond Bank. This is a pass-through grant that allows us to provide several types of technical assistance to individual water and wastewater utilities. This money allows us to help these systems regardless of size, geographic location, and issue. At a time when small utilities are struggling, we ask that you not pull this lifeline away from them. When people in our industry and your communities need help, we help them. This allocation, is dedicated to water and wastewater utilities when they are looking for help with operational, managerial and or financial capacity.

One of MRWA's most valuable services is our emergency response. When water or wastewater systems face unexpected challenges, such as natural disasters, equipment failures, or contamination events, MRWA provides immediate support to help utilities restore operations quickly and safely. Our multifaceted knowledge and rapid response ensure that communities experience minimal disruption and maintain access to clean water and effective wastewater management. We have repeatedly been cited by the Drinking Water Program as a reliable and capable partner when it comes to emergency and long-term response to utilities in need. These critical services are often paid for through this General Fund appropriation.

MRWA also provides guidance to the boards of trustees responsible for overseeing water and wastewater utilities. Managing these essential services often involves complex decision-making, regulatory compliance, and financial planning. MRWA staff help trustees navigate difficult situations and make informed choices that benefit their communities in the long term.

To be clear, this funding is not used for Rural Water advocacy or lobbying efforts. While not an exhaustive list, these funds have allowed us, in the past year, to assist in the communities of:

- Caribou
- New Sharon
- Limestone
- Auburn
- East Pittson
- Wiscasset
- Milo
- Corinna
- Washburn
- Brunswick
- Danforth
- Bingham
- Gray
- Boothbay
- Bethel
- West Paris
- Fort Fairfield
- Kingfield
- East Vassalboro
- Mars Hill
- Madawaska
- Brewer

Through these services and more, the Maine Rural Water Association is still a critical and indispensable partner to rural water and wastewater utilities. MRWA's commitment to education, technical support, emergency response, and governance guidance strengthens the capacity of local utilities, ensuring that Maine's communities have access to safe, clean water for generations to come. We respectfully ask that you support the funding proposed in section 0699.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have now or if you have any questions or concerns after this hearing, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at Bradley.Sawyer@MaineRWA.org or 207-737-9014.