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THE MAINE SENATE  
131st Legislature

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**LD 1449, "Resolve, Requiring the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services to Conduct a Study of the State's Grant, Contracting and Procurement Practices"**  
**Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government**  
**April 16, 2025**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

I am Trey Stewart; and I represent Senate District 2, which includes several communities in Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in strong support of LD 1449, a bill that seeks to ensure equity, transparency and accountability in the allocation of public funding in the State of Maine, particularly for rural, community-based organizations that play a vital role in reaching our most underserved citizens.

I come before you today wearing two hats:

- As the proud Senator for District 2, representing the hardworking people of northern Maine, including many of the most rural and economically-challenged parts of our state.
- And as a Board Member of Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP), a long-established, trusted organization with an over-five-decades-long track record of service and impact across Aroostook County.

Let me begin by stating the core issue that brings me here today and that is indicative of a more widespread problem for organizations responding to procurement opportunities with the State of Maine. ACAP, along with several other organizations, submitted a proposal released by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services in 2022 entitled, "*Health Equity and Infrastructure & Capacity Building Grant*." This was a grant opportunity intended to reach Maine's rural and BIPOC populations, both communities that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Despite submitting a complete, compliant, and mission-aligned application, ACAP was not selected for funding. Our subsequent appeal revealed a troubling pattern:

- Multiple awarded applicants had incomplete applications;
- Required documentation was missing, including key materials like financial viability reports;
- And yet, these applicants were still awarded contracts without any documented rationale or justification.

In contrast, ACAP submitted a full and complete proposal, including the very documentation that was stated as *required* in multiple locations of the RFA.

Let me be clear: this is not a matter of sour grapes over a lost grant. This is about fundamental fairness, the integrity of our public procurement process and the equitable treatment of rural organizations who must already work harder to serve larger geographic areas with fewer resources.

As a Senator and public steward, I am deeply troubled by what this situation reveals. The state's own counsel in the appeal noted that the purpose of this procurement process is to “assure the best possible use of public funds.” And yet, the decision to allow incomplete applications to advance – without record or justification – undermines that very principle. Moreover, this process turned its back on what was clearly communicated by state officials themselves during pre-application outreach – that this funding would include a “rural carve-out.” ACAP was encouraged to apply on this basis; but when awards were announced, we found that:

- 12 of the 15 awarded organizations were based in Portland or its immediate vicinity;
- Two were based in Lewiston/Auburn;
- Only one awardee served Washington County;
- And none had a footprint or on-the-ground services in Aroostook County or much of western and northern Maine.

In short, our most rural counties were shut out despite the original promise and intent of the program.

The story doesn't end there. ACAP, in fact, appealed this decision successfully, with a review panel determining that the state acted in error awarding agencies that failed to submit required documents, including the most recent year's completed fiscal audit and proof of liability insurance. Rather than put the entire RFA back out to bid, the State proceeded to award the agencies that had submitted the requisite documentation and issue a new RFA, specifically for organizations under \$5 million in annual operating costs and removing the requirements of proposing agencies to include the requisite documents in the initial proposal. In effect, the same agencies disqualified as a result of the successful appeal were subsequently awarded in a new contract gerrymandered to fit.

As a policymaker, I believe this is a call to action. We must not let this experience repeat itself. LD 1449 would take an important step toward:

- Establishing greater transparency and accountability in how grants are awarded;
- Ensuring rural and community-based organizations are not unfairly excluded;
- Protecting the public trust by aligning procurement outcomes with legislative intent.

This is not just about one grant. It's about a pattern of systemic inequity that risks becoming a precedent if left unaddressed. If the rules say “only complete applications will be considered,” that must mean something. Otherwise, we send a message that following the rules doesn't matter and that only certain regions or organizations are truly heard.

I respectfully urge this Committee to support LD 1449 and, in doing so, send a message to every rural community based organization in our state that you matter, your work matters and your voice matters.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to justice and fairness for all Maine people.