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Testimony of Tony Cameron

On Behalf of the Maine Tourism & Hospitality Alliance

Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
and Housing and Economic Development

February 19, 2026

***In Opposition to LD 2212, Part EE, "An Act Making Supplemental 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, 2026 and June 30, 2027"***

Senators Rotundo and Curry, Representatives Gattine and Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development, my name is Tony Cameron, and I am the CEO of the Maine Tourism Association. I'm here today on behalf of the Maine Tourism and Hospitality Alliance (the Alliance). The Alliance is comprised of the Maine Tourism Association, Retail Association of Maine, HospitalityMaine, Ski Maine Association, and the Maine Campground Owners Association. Our associations are dedicated to the collective success of tourism in Maine. Our organizations represent employers and operators in every region of the state. We respectfully oppose Part EE of LD 2212, "*An Act Making Supplemental 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, 2026 and June 30, 2027.*"

Part EE within the bill proposes to remove \$700,000 from the Tourism Marketing Promotion Fund (TMF) within the Department of Economic and Community Development to the Municipal Investment Fund housed within the same department.

Founded in 2001, the TMF was established in statute to provide stable, dedicated marketing dollars to promote Maine as a premier travel destination. Importantly, only 5% of the revenue generated from both the 8% meals and 9% lodging tax flows into the TMF, the State retains the remaining 95%. This structure creates what is, in effect, a self-fulfilling economic cycle: strategic marketing investment drives visitation, visitation generates tax revenue, and the vast majority of that revenue benefits the State.

I would like to emphasize that the Alliance appreciates the strong working relationship with the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT). We are in regular communication and routinely collaborate with Director Carolann Ouelette and her team. Our concern today is not with the Office of Tourism but with preserving the integrity of the fund

itself.

The Alliance has existed for nearly as long as the TMF, in part because it was formed to protect this fund. Our members are protective of it because these dollars are generated directly from the industry's own success. When those funds are redirected for other purposes, it departs from the long-standing commitment to keep them dedicated to tourism promotion. Businesses collect and remit these taxes with the understanding that a portion will be reinvested to keep visitors coming and businesses operating.

Dipping into this fund for purposes unrelated to its statutory mission sets the wrong precedent. These dollars have a real return on investment, generating roughly \$15-\$20 in visitor spending for every \$1 invested. Any cut ultimately weakens the principle that tourism-generated revenue should be reinvested in tourism.

Tourism is one of Maine's largest private industries, supporting over 113,000 jobs and generating nearly \$15 billion annual economic impact. Notably, the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) reports that 94% of visitors polled intend to return—a strong indicator that strategic marketing is working. We also know that restaurant and lodging taxes collected reduce the tax burden on Maine households by nearly \$2,200 every year, demonstrating how a strong tourism economy directly benefits residents across the state. Maintaining a stable and protected marketing fund is a part of what allows Maine to compete with other states that continue to invest heavily in tourism promotion.

When visitor numbers decline, the impacts are immediate: fewer reservations, reduced employee hours, and less spending throughout local economies. Protecting the TMF helps protect Maine jobs, municipal revenues, and community vitality.

We urge you not to alter time-honored precedent by diverting these funds for other uses. Maintaining the integrity of the TMF sends a clear message of support to tourism businesses that the revenue tourism businesses generate for the state will continue to be reinvested as intended.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to reject part EE of LD 2212.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



CEO, Maine Tourism Association