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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

Neither For Nor Against

LD 82, An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Laws by Extending Indefinitely the Presumption Applying to Law Enforcement Officers, Corrections Officers, E-9-1-1 Dispatchers, Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Persons Diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

February 11, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Kate Dufour, and I am submitting testimony “neither for nor against” LD 82 on behalf of the municipal leaders who serve on the Association’s Legislative Policy Committee.

As we’ve testified in the past, municipal leaders and residents greatly appreciate the services provided by first responders, dispatchers, and correctional officers, and to that end annually participate in town meetings and council budget proceedings that result in support for funding public safety programs. Municipal officials also recognize the pressures that the provision of public safety services places staff and the related toll on their personal health and wellness.

To that end, in late August of 2024, MMA implemented the first in the nation ServeStrong program. The initiative is a collaboration among the National League of Cities (NLC), NLC-Risk Information Sharing Consortium, and the Association, that is specifically designed to provide first responders and their families access to confidential, web-based behavioral services offered by professionals familiar with the stress and trauma experienced by law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical services providers, dispatchers, and correctional officers.

Additionally, over the last five years, MMA Risk Management Services (RMS) has provided members of its Workers’ Compensation Fund access to the Critical Incident Stress Management program, which has provided training to over 300 public safety employees. RMS also provides grants and safety scholarships to member communities that are geared towards supporting first responder mental health awareness.

That being said, MMA is providing testimony “neither for nor against” LD 82 to again ask for the state’s assistance in funding the increases in Workers’ Compensation costs that are associated with the implementation of existing presumptions of workplace safety.

While we understand that the public safety officials who are covered under this presumption are largely municipal and county employees, the provision of related services benefits all, and in some cases are provided at the direction of state policies and regulations. For example, municipal law enforcement officers and county sheriffs enforce the state's criminal and traffic laws. Our county jails house individuals who have violated state laws, rather than local ordinances. Fire departments across the state respond to the emergency calls of nonprofit entities, many of which are exempted from paying property taxes. Additionally, municipal employers do not control whether employees work for other public safety providers, or the number of hours worked each week, which in some cases provides very little time to decompress, thereby potentially contributing to the stress of the work.

Property taxpayers are doing their share to fund public safety services that serve all, and would greatly appreciate state financial assistance, whether that is through reimbursements for added costs, or through the establishment of state funded and administered high risk workers' compensation pool.

Thank you for your time and consideration.