



Maine Municipal
Association

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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition to LD 434

An Act To Clarify the Bonding Authority of Counties for Capital

Maintenance Projects

March 3, 2021

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham and I am offering this testimony in strong opposition to LD 434 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association at the direction of its statewide 70 member Legislative Policy Committee.

Municipal officials must directly ask their taxpayers to support bonding measures, regardless of their size, unless they have been allowed a level of bonding bestowed by their taxpayers directly through the democratic processes provided under Title 30-A § 2104, the charter amendment and adoption process.

This process is a vital democratic principle that ensures the property taxpayers have an opportunity to question expenditures and support or oppose the project based on information provided by municipal officials. Every year, the same payers weigh the needs and desires of their community against large expenditures assisting municipalities in considering alternatives or supporting the fiscal narrative as presented. They pay and they chose what faith they place in their municipal officials without requiring a vote.

Maine Counties have the same ability to go directly to the people paying the bills they submit to each municipality for their services and develop a relationship with those communities in support of county needs. As drafted, LD 434 circumvents this important democratic process and asking for state statute to strip not only the oversight process from the property taxpayers in a county but would also strip those payers from being included with bestowing such ability on a county based on their trust in county management voiced through a charter amendment process.

Municipal officials see no reason why the bonding process should be even less responsive to the taxpayer than the municipal bonding process and remain concerned at what seems to be an attempt to override a democratic process for taxpayer oversight.

Additionally, such circumventing of the local legislative processes further disguises the chronic underfunding of statewide services that counties must assume due to lack of state investment in these facilities of statewide importance. The county unit of government needs to see the property taxpayers as advocates in support of their mission and should use the bonding and charter amendment process to improve those relationships.

While municipal officials understand that many unfunded state mandates are fielded by County officials leaving little for capital projects, it never the less remains important that the final payors of such services have direct input on the burdens such capital projects impose on the bill sent to their municipalities. The bond referendum process is the only citizen vote on the fiscal management of county services.

For all these reasons, municipal officials urge you to vote ought not to pass unanimously on LD 434.