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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support For

LD 2229 - An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, Highway Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

March 5, 2024

Sen. Chipman, Rep. Crafts and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am in support for LD 2229, *An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, Highway Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*, on behalf of MMA's 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) who are elected by their selectboards and councils in Maine's 35 senate district to establish positions on legislation impacting municipalities with the broadest understanding of the difference in impacts of policy on these vital services in all areas of the state.

This broad understanding at the municipal level of the system of interdependent service provision—in particular—is why officials support section 0291, for the increase in Maine State Police (MSP). Every police agency in this state, including county policing services, are reliant on the services provided by the Maine State Police, which in turn is reliant upon the political will of this body to appropriately resource. As the investigation of criminal activity has become more complex, threats to public safety increasingly stretch beyond political subdivisions, and mental health resources lacking state-wide, the investment in and appropriate staffing of shared resources are even more crucial. Rural communities are even more disadvantaged.

Municipal officials know that it is a false narrative to equate investment in adequate state-wide policing resources as a replacement for investment in mental health and substance use stabilization services. These two vital public services need adequate funding to achieve their mission and goals, and their public service investment needs should be viewed and invested in independently.

Additionally, it is a false narrative to equate investment in adequate state policing services as a policy that promotes or exacerbates the incarceration of individuals. These are reductionist statements to fail to understand there are far more vitally important duties provided

by the system of law enforcement beyond locking up individuals or perpetuating the policy to use jails as defacto mental health facilities.

This argument also fails to understand that test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder not the visible evidence of police action in addressing crime and disorder. Conversely the use of justice mechanism to address mental health and behavioral health symptoms is illustrative of the failure to invest in alternatives, not an over investment in shared policing services.

Failing to invest in the only shared policing system in this state for more than 30 years has had extreme knock-on effects leaving every community in the state on the hook to build and pay for services that are already stretched thin by the 35 million tourists visiting every summer and powerless to collect revenue from this population for their impacts, unlike the investment in MSP. Likewise, dedicating resources from the state level to backfill rural needs without balancing the availability for the state obligations to all other municipalities redirects that burden again to the local level. This has meant high risk call needs in organized communities are delayed because those same shared resources are already stretched thin with demand and the agency need to balance the health and wellness of staff who were already on duty well beyond normal expectations.

A decision to not invest in the staffing requested in the supplemental budget, which has been identified as the baseline necessary to maintain existing call sharing agreements, means you are requiring them to be built with less efficiency locally, and at greater cost, to address all of the other public safety needs required from law enforcement. This budget request is a direct result of county agencies in our most rural regions asking for assistance in meeting their rural patrol needs while the need for specialized response and investigation resources has grown in all other communities. These include positive collaboration you do not hear about in the statehouse like the desire to protect the public safety and coordinate communication public safety services during large gatherings to celebrate our heritage or protect university students celebrating the end of term with a day of service.

The most eminent municipal concern and example is one that has already been experienced repeatedly by this legislature this session. This concern is the increase in threats both virtually and in person against local government officials and even more concerningly threats against the volunteers and staff who dedicate their time to the administration of elections. Only one of the 130 police agencies must provide policing services to the 488 municipalities responsible for providing the mechanisms of democracy on the day. Those individuals deserve rural patrol and shared intelligence and threat resources to be maintained beyond the level this request is supporting, and ask you not create an even greater public safety vacuum in our state-wide interdependent system for political expediency.

Thank you for considering the municipal perspective on these issues. If you have any questions about the Association's position on these provisions of the supplemental budget bill, please do not hesitate to contact me at rgraham@memun.org or 1-800-452-8786.