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To: Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Honorable Members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and State and Local Government

From: Bradley Sawyer, Director of Government Affairs

Date: March 3, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of L.D 221, Section 0699, Maine Municipal Bond Bank – Maine Rural Water Association

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Honorable Members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and State and Local Government, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Brad Sawyer, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Maine Rural Water Association.

The Maine Rural Water Association is a member driven non-profit organization that specializes in training and technical assistance for water and wastewater utilities. Our membership spans roughly 300 systems from some of the largest utilities in the state with thousands of water and sewer connections to some of the smallest, with customers in the tens and increasing trepidation about the future.

The federal Safe Drinking Water Act requires the same regulatory compliance of the largest water utility in the state, such as the Portland Water District, as it does of the smallest: the mobile home parks, schools, and businesses. Unlike our largest utilities, these small public water systems are not in the business of selling water and our technical assistance is necessary to safeguard public health and maintain compliance. Similarly, publicly owned wastewater treatment facilities in small towns are economically disadvantaged compared to larger municipalities when complying with the federal Clean Water Act. With increasing regulation from both federal and state governments some of these utilities find it difficult to keep up to date with the latest requirement.

Maine Rural Water receives a General Fund Appropriation which is administered by the Maine Municipal Bond Bank. This is a pass-through grant that allows us to provide various types of technical assistance to individual water and wastewater utilities. This money allows us to help these systems regardless of membership status in our organization. At a time when small utilities are struggling, we ask that you not pull this lifeline away from them. When people our industry and your communities need help, we help them. This allocation, while a drop in the bucket of the entire budget, is critical to water and wastewater utilities when they are looking for help with grant writing, management and merger questions, compliance and financial issues, training, record retention, annual reviews, Covid-19 protocols, and anything else that comes with running a water and wastewater utility in Maine.

I am happy to try to answer any questions you may have now or if you have any questions or concerns after this hearing please do not hesitate to reach out to me at Bradley.Sawyer@MaineRWA.org or 207-737-9014.