Mills Administration Approves Second Round of COVID-19 Prevention and Protection Awards Under Keep Maine Healthy Plan

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$4 million supports more than 80 Maine municipalities and Tribal governments as they take action to protect Maine people and visitors from COVID-19

AUGUSTA– The Mills Administration announced today that it has approved an additional $4 million in awards to more than 80 municipalities and Tribal governments across the state under a second round of *Keep Maine Healthy* funding to support local COVID-19 public health, education, and prevention efforts.

The announcement follows the award in late June of the first round of funding (//www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/mills-administration-approves-covid-19-prevention-and-protection-grant-awards-municipalities) to municipalities under the *Keep Maine Healthy Plan*, with approximately $9 million awarded to nearly 100 municipalities. Today, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) approved COVID-19 Prevention and Protection Plans submitted by 82 municipalities and Tribal governments and began notifying municipalities of their awards. Approximately half of the awards will go to municipalities and Tribal governments that are new applicants, while the others will benefit returning municipalities.

In total, this Keep Maine Healthy funding will benefit 132 municipalities and two Tribal governments --representing about 1 million people, or 75 percent of the State's year-round population, along with summer and fall visitors.

The awards are supported by Coronavirus Relief Funds from the CARES Act and are distributed on a reimbursement basis as communities implement these programs.

"The progress our state has made thus far in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 is in part a testament to the hard work communities have done on the front lines to keep Maine healthy," **said Governor Mills**. "While I am proud of that progress, we cannot let our guard down. With these additional grants, our Administration will continue to support municipalities as they work to educate the public on the dangers of COVID-19, implement and encourage compliance with public health and safety guidelines, and protect all Maine people and visitors."

"We thank Maine's cities, towns and Tribal governments for their partnership in protecting Maine people and visitors against the spread of COVID-19," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "This funding has supported their innovative responses on the front lines of this pandemic and will continue to bolster this critical work into the fall."

This initiative incentivizes municipalities and Tribal governments to develop and implement their own COVID-19 prevention, education and protection plans by reimbursing municipal costs associated with public health education and prevention activities. These plans aim to help keep Maine people and visitors safe from COVID-19 by including one or more of the following:

- **Public education activities:** This could include printing and posting of existing State or national COVID-19 prevention information and developing local educational activities that are consistent with CDC guidelines. Costs eligible for reimbursement would include staff time for planning and education activities and costs for signage, materials, website development, brochures and mailing.
- **Physical distancing and public health support**: This could include fences, tape, and signage for physical distancing in public spaces and closed streets; providing staff to limit crowds in front of restaurants, bars, beaches and other sites; new traffic pattern signage and education; purchases of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer to be made available for staff, visitors, and for use at public locations; and extra cleaning supplies and additional staff time required for enhanced cleaning and management of public spaces and restroom facilities.
- **Local business assistance**: This includes staff time for a Code Enforcement Officer, Local Health Officer, or other person designated by the municipality or Tribal government to be the local contact for educating local businesses on best practices. This may include following up on public complaints and, for certain cases, reporting to State officials when there is a potential public health violation that cannot be quickly resolved through educational means.

The Mills Administration worked closely with the Maine Municipal Association and the Mayor's Coalition on the creation of the municipal awards program.

"The Maine Municipal Association is pleased again to learn that 82 cities and towns will receive $4 million in grants to protect their citizens' and visitors' health under Governor Mills' second round of the Keep Maine Healthy program for COVID-19 expenses," **said Stephen Gove, Executive Director, Maine Municipal Association**. "The program represents a welcomed partnership between the state and municipalities during our summer and fall tourism seasons. The grants recognize the important role municipalities play in public health protection and education during the current public health emergency. "

The municipal programs vary in size and scope. For example:

Sanford proposes to support a regional partnership among the City, York County Community Action Corporation, and the Sanford-Springvale YMCA to assist medically underserved populations in the area. The City plans to launch a public education campaign, hire two "park safety ambassadors" to provide education at the Holdsworth Public Park in Springvale, and open and fund 10 virtual learning sites to provide educational programming for elementary school children in aftercare settings.

"The City of Sanford is Keeping Maine Healthy and helping protect the area economy and its people in partnership with the York County Community Action Corporation and the surrounding towns of Acton, Alfred, North Berwick, Lebanon, Shapleigh, and Waterboro and their community libraries," **said Ian Houseal, Director of Community Development, City of Sanford**. "The Health Educator Surge Team's goal is to flexibly support and nudge the public and businesses carrying on with business, enjoying recreational activities, going back to work, returning to school and keeping on with daily life and supporting those experiencing social isolation, and helping maintain health and financial independence during the pandemic during this summer and fall."

Bethel proposes a "Keep Healthy, Keep Open" campaign featuring illustrations of a Masked Moose character on signage and other educational material and a live costumed character who will visit schools and businesses and engage locals and visitors to convey the importance of COVID-19 prevention. The Masked Moose will distribute kits to approximately 100 businesses containing branded, reusable masks for employees, disposable masks to distribute to customers, signage, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies.

"In developing our *Keep Healthy, Keep Open Masked Moose Campaign*, our team recognized that those living in and visiting Bethel are here for a wide variety of reasons and are grateful we remain largely open due to the existing efforts of our community," **said Loretta Powers, Bethel Town Manager**. "We are appreciative to be awarded the funds to deliver a serious message in a fun way. Team members Brent Bachelder, Amy Halsted, Sara Hemeon, Jessie Perkins and I believe the distribution of targeted messaging through an illustrated and live moose brand will be memorable. There is always a lot of buzz about seeing a moose."

Auburn will focus public education efforts on New Mainers through door-to-door visits to distribute educational materials that will include testing site locations and other information to help address health concerns. The City will also distribute personal protective equipment (PPE) materials including face coverings and supplies during visits with New Mainers.

"I'm both pleased and reassured to hear that our community will receive this vital funding," **said Auburn Mayor Jason Levesque**. "Thank you to the Mills Administration for taking action to support and empower the resiliency and recovery efforts of Maine municipalities and for recognizing the innovative measures Auburn municipal staff is taking, led by City Manager Phil Crowell, to serve this community. Their forward-thinking efforts will keep our local businesses open, and our residents healthy and safe."

The Penobscot Nation plans to prepare COVID-19 educational materials for distribution at their annual Health Fair, which will be modified this year to a drive-through style configuration to promote physical distancing. Community Care Kits including masks, sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, and other respiratory illness supportive supplies will be handed out to community members. A health screening station will be set up for residents and guests at the entrance to the Penobscot Reservation.

"The Penobscot Nation appreciates this opportunity to receive Keep Maine Healthy funding from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services," **said Candy Henderly, Director of the Penobscot Nation Health Department**. "The health and wellbeing of our Tribal members are paramount, and this funding provides a pathway to increase health literacy surrounding COVID-19. We look forward to the health promotion and disease prevention activities that this funding makes possible for both our Public Safety and Public Health departments."

These local actions will be an extension of the Maine CDC's work to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As part of *Keep Maine Healthy* (//www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine/keepmainehealthy) , the Maine CDC is overseeing this initiative. Costs associated with approved public health education and prevention activities from August 1 through October 31, 2020 will be reimbursed.

These awards from the Mills Administration build on its support for municipal governments. In June, the Mills Administration also announced (//www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/mills-administration-dedicates-coronavirus-relief-funding-state-and-local-match-fema-public) that it is dedicating $35 million in Coronavirus Relief Funding to help local and Tribal governments and other qualified entities cover costs incurred as a result of COVID-19.

The awards come at a time when Maine, adjusted for population, ranks 3rd lowest in the nation in terms of positive cases; 8th lowest in the nation in terms of deaths; 3rd lowest in terms of patients ever-hospitalized out of the 36 states reporting; and 4th highest in the percentage of people who have recovered out of the 45 states reporting.

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