S&P Global Ratings

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Research Update:

Maine Municipal Bond Bank Series 2025A Bonds Rated 'AA+'; Outlook Is Stable

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Overview

Credit Highlights

- S&P Global Ratings assigned its 'AA+' long-term rating to Maine Municipal Bond Bank's $65.3 million series 2025A bonds.
- At the same time, we affirmed our 'AA+' rating on the bank's general resolution bonds outstanding.
- The outlook is stable.

Rationale

Security

The bank will use the 2025A bond proceeds to make loans to 31 governmental units. Securing the bonds are the bank's full faith general obligation pledge, municipal bonds purchased from governmental units borrowing funds from the bank, municipal bond payments made under the bank's 1973 general resolution, and various funds and accounts established under the resolution. Municipal bonds are purchased from governmental units with the proceeds of the bank's bonds.

Credit highlights

The bank's program benefits from a state aid intercept mechanism and a moral obligation of the state to replenish the debt service reserve (DSR) to the required level if it ever falls below this point. In addition, the program has a supplemental reserve fund and a special discretionary reserve fund that can be used to pay debt service.

The 'AA+' rating reflects our assessment of the following characteristics:

- A very strong enterprise risk profile, providing public and essential governmental functions to the State of Maine, created under state statute. The program has explicit statutory support from the state government to support debt service if needed, and was also established by statute;

- Robust overcollateralization, in the form of three reserve funds, that is capable of withstanding S&P Global Ratings loss coverage scenario, based on the credit quality of the asset pool and consolidated cash flows, run at the 'AAA' category loss stress;
- Very strong operating performance that has not experienced a defaulted or delinquent loan in program history; and
- Overall strong financial policies and practices.

Offsetting these strengths is the lack of significant equity support from multiple levels of government, as some other pool programs receive. We view this characteristic as marginally weaker than that of other programs that have substantially all program reserves funded through equity contributions that are not needed to make debt service payments.

Outlook

The stable outlook reflects our expectation that management will adhere to its current policies and practices, and the bank will sustain extremely strong operating performance and continue to make loans to a diverse base of borrowers throughout Maine. As additional bonds are issued, we also expect the bank will preserve its historical practice of increasing the bond-funded DSR fund balance and maintain at least some other equity positions in its other nonbond-funded reserve funds consistent with the program's permitted investment securities.

Downside scenario

Within the two-year outlook horizon, we could lower the rating or revise the outlook to negative if pledged reserve funds and other reserve balances fall or do not continue to increase in proportion to the overall loan portfolio. Because the pledged DSR is eventually liquidated to make bond payments, the amount of other liquidity and available reserves is a key credit factor supporting the rating. In addition, we could lower the rating or revise the outlook to negative if the program experiences loan delinquencies or defaults, although we understand that in practice a majority of the loans have a state aid intercept feature to help minimize actual losses.

Upside scenario

We do not consider an upgrade likely, at least within the two-year outlook horizon, because it would probably require an improvement in the enterprise risk profile. An improvement in this score is possible if the statutory framework for the program changes, but we view this possibility as remote in the near term.

Credit Opinion

Enterprise risk profile: Very strong

We view the program’s enterprise risk profile as very strong, due to a combination of the low industry risk profile for municipal pools and the programs’ very strong market position. Maine Municipal Bond Bank was established in 1973 as outlined in Title 30-A, Chapter 225 of Maine Revised Statutes. Explicit statutory language exists for state support of debt service, if needed, through both a state aid intercept mechanism and a moral obligation of the state to replenish the DSR to the required level if it ever falls below this point. The state is also empowered to take control of the finances of any borrower that defaults on a municipal bond payment to the bank. All funds remain in the bank and are not transferred to other agencies or departments. The bond bank plays an important role in providing cost-effective financing for local governments, and we believe challenges to program demand are unlikely.

Financial risk profile: Extremely strong

We assess the program's loss coverage score as extremely strong, based on our view of overcollateralization achieved from the multiple reserve funds in relation to required debt service payments and the diverse borrower composition. The program's level of overcollateralization reflects the ability of the cash flows to withstand our 'AAA' credit loss coverage. The program also covers our 'AAA' rated largest obligor loss coverage.

After the 2025A issuance, the pool will have approximately $1.2 billion of loan principal repayments from a diverse pool of 260 unique borrowers, with approximately $1.1 billion of bonds outstanding. Most of the borrowers consist of municipalities and school districts. A large portion of the bank's loan portfolio consists of school projects eligible for debt service subsidies under Maine's school construction program. Maine provides an annual subsidy, subject to annual state appropriation, for debt service costs for eligible projects; these subsidies are paid directly to the bank's trustee on behalf of the local unit. The subsidy typically ranges from 15%-85%, with certain projects receiving a full 100% reimbursement. After the 2025A bonds close, the top 10 borrowers will total less than 50% of the portfolio, with the City of Sanford remaining the largest borrower (10.22% of the loan portfolio outstanding).

Overcollateralization available to cure loan defaults comes from the pledged supplemental reserve fund within the general resolution and an unpledged discretionary reserve that we view as available. Pursuant to the first supplemental reserve fund to the general resolution, money held in the fund must be used to bring it to the required amount before the bank requests a state appropriation for the same purpose. We understand that management would also use any money in the discretionary reserve before liquidating funds in the DSR, but there is no legal requirement to do so, as those funds are not pledged under the resolution.

Recently, the bank pledged to Maine Connectivity Authority approximately $7.5 million in the form of a standby letter of credit (LOC) for the authority to participate in a federal grant program. The LOC will amortize as the funds are disbursed (fully amortized in approximately three years) and can only be drawn on if the authority cannot make payments. We have incorporated this pledge into our cash flow analysis.

Management states that annual debt service coverage (DSC) from pledged loan repayments, interest earnings on investments, and planned annual maturities of reserve fund investments is about 1x in each year, with any surplus revenues then able to accumulate over time and available to cure defaults if needed. The bond-funded DSR must be drawn down over time to make debt service payments and is not projected to increase from nonbond-funded sources due to the lack of significant equity support from multiple levels of government, as some other pool programs receive. The current DSR valuation of $156.72 million (at cost) is substantial, with 100% of the reserve funded with bond proceeds. The reserve is composed of various U.S. government obligations, cash, and guaranteed bank investment contracts.

We considered the state aid intercept provision and moral obligation of the state to replenish the bank's DSR in our analysis. We allowed for a higher recovery of defaulted revenues at 95% due to the presence of a moral obligation to replenish the DSR to the required level.

We view the financial policies and practices as ranging from strong to adequate. This assessment is based on the following factors:

- Each new transaction is reviewed by program staff, and there is a thorough application process for all loan applicants.
- Staff collects audit information annually and focuses on both payment monitoring and credit monitoring.
- New loan payments are made 30 days before debt service, but older loans have payments due five days beforehand. Currently, 76% of loans are required to make payments 30 days before the debt service payment date, including all newly originated loans.
- Management is in constant communication with borrowers and typically knows loan demand six months to one year in advance of each bond sale.
- Investment guidelines are defined in the resolution and are structured to mature when the related bond payment is due.

Credit Snapshot

- Program description: The bond bank, established in 1973 by state statute, provides loans to a variety of governmental units in Maine. It is authorized to issue bonds to make loans to counties, cities, towns, school administrative districts, community school districts, or other quasi-municipal corporations in the state.
- Flow of funds: Loan revenues and other funds from the bank are held in the reserve fund (solely to the payment of the interest on and principal of the bonds as they become due and payable and for the retirement of bonds all series for the resolution are paid in parity). Money cannot be withdrawn if it reduces the amount in the reserve fund to an amount less than the required DSR, except for payment of interest then due and payable on bonds and the principal of bonds then maturing and payable and for the retirement of bonds in accordance with the terms of any contract between the bank and its bondholders and for which payments from other money or reserve funds of the bank are not then available.
- Summary statistics: With the 2025A bond issuance, total principal loan revenue pledged to the resolution will be $1.2 billion. The borrower portfolio consists of 260 separate entities of which the largest is the City of Sanford, with $111.9 million outstanding, constituting 10.22% of all loans outstanding. The top 10 obligors hold 47.97% of all loans outstanding; no other borrower represents more than 10% of principal outstanding).

Ratings List	
New Issue Ratings	
US$65.301 mil st revolving fd ser 2025 due 06/30/2033	
Long Term Rating	AA+/Stable
Ratings Affirmed	
Water & Sewer	
Maine Mun Bnd Bank, ME State Revolving Fund General Resolution	AA+/Stable

The ratings appearing below the new issues represent an aggregation of debt issues (ASID) associated with related maturities. The maturities similarly reflect our opinion about the creditworthiness of the U.S. Public Finance obligor's legal pledge for payment of the financial obligation. Nevertheless, these maturities may have different credit ratings than the rating presented next to the ASID depending on whether or not additional legal pledge(s) support the specific maturity's payment obligation, such as credit enhancement, as a result of defeasance, or other factors.