



Serving the Municipalities of Southern Maine for Over 50 years

Testimony of Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission in Support of
DECD's Housing Opportunity Program
a part of LD 258, *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025.*

February 8, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing: I, Paul Schumacher, Executive Director of Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC), urge the full funding for DECD's Housing Opportunity Program, contained in the Governor's biennial budget.

SMPDC is a regional planning agency created by state statute serving 39 member communities in York, southern Oxford, and Cumberland Counties; our members range from coastal communities along the mainline of the Maine Turnpike to rural, inland communities in Western Maine.

Our Brownfields program is the most successful in New England and has facilitated millions of dollars in redeveloped and reactivated buildings, providing new opportunities for housing and commerce through adaptive reuse. Our sustainability and resiliency work, which convenes coastal communities to work together to address climate change, is at the forefront of such efforts within the state of Maine.

SMPDC also operates an extremely robust land use planning program that provides on-call comprehensive planning, development review, and technical assistance to member communities, many of which have little to no in-house staffing capacity given their small size. At any given time, we serve as the planner for numerous jurisdictions, a number of which have seen significant staff turnover since the pandemic, thus further increasing our volume of work. No other regional planning agency within Maine takes on land use planning activities to the extent that SMPDC does, and the adoption of LD 2003, while laudable from a policy standpoint, will require significant work on the part of this agency to both brief local land use boards on the implications of the changes to statute and to draft the ordinance amendments needed to effectuate it.

Land use policy changes are complex undertakings that many of our communities cannot successfully complete without adequate support. Regional planning agencies have expertise, local knowledge, existing trusted relationships, and the ability to help their municipalities make the best housing policies choices possible.

The funding contained in the Governor's budget will enable DECD to implement its Housing Opportunity Program through the work of regional planning agencies like SMPDC, together with many other qualified regional planning agencies throughout the state.

With full funding we are confident that our municipal members will have the support they need to implement housing policies that make meaningful progress toward solving our regional and state housing crisis. Without this funding, every regional planning agency will be severely limited in their capacity to be effective and efficient implementing partners with the state, thus handicapping municipalities and their ability to implement this legislation.

For all these reasons we urge you to vote to support full funding for DECD's Housing Opportunity Program as proposed in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and please let us know if SMPDC can help you with your important work on the Governor's budget, and the implementation of state housing policies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Schumacher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Schumacher, Executive Director
Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission