



## **Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs**

**In Support of Funding in L.D. 258 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"**

February 15, 2023

Greetings Chairs Senator Rotundo and Representative Sachs and distinguished honorable members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. I am Matthew Shaw, Chair of the Steering Committee for the Realize Maine Network, a program of the Maine Development Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the budget proposal for the Maine Development Foundation.

The Realize Maine Network is a partnership of regional networking groups and organizations that are focused on the future of our state and who work together to retain and attract people to Maine, empower them to reach their greatest career and civic potentials, and create opportunities to keep them living, working, and thriving in our state. I can personally attest to the work these groups do at a high level and how that work trickles down peppering our great State of Maine with opportunities of growth to our social, economic, and environmental equity. The Network operates with working agreements among seven (7) member organizations to share best practices, identify and collaborate on partnership opportunities and promote each other's work and accomplishments in a statewide manner. Together the organizations reach over 10,000 individuals using social media to influence professional development, togetherness, but most importantly the benefits of living and working within the various regions of Maine.

The \$33,444 of earmarked funds designated for the Network as part of the \$58,444 for the Maine Development Foundation, support our mini-grants, such as Statewide, Collaboration, and Marketing Grants, as well as staff and administrative support. Where the Realize Maine Network is vastly comprised of volunteer-led boards and members, this is invaluable for the network. In addition, these funds go to scholarship(s) for the Network to help send affiliate group members to the Maine Development Foundation's Leadership Maine and Institute for Civic Leadership programs, of which many distinguished community, business and government leaders have all participated and through that experience, have gained valuable skill sets becoming part of an exceptional, expansive professional network.

Through the help of the designated funds, two (2) new groups were added to the network over the last year. One being PROPEL focused on the Portland area and the other being Live + Work in Maine. Being a rural State, with vastly different geographic areas, we were able to utilize funding to help increase the size of the Network's Steering Committee, significantly heightening the awareness of our group in the communities, resulting in the formation and strengthening of existing and new partnerships with area organizations and businesses.

As one of the group's most notable accomplishments within the last decade, 2017 marked the beginning of the Magnetize Maine Summit, a recurring collaborative effort across multiple areas of our State, designed to facilitate the identification and discussion of efforts needed to transform Maine's future work environment and inspire younger workers to move to and remain in our great state. The Summit started in Bangor, then traveled to Auburn and then most recently featured the newly revitalized Downtown Waterville Area in 2022. This year

the Summit will be hosted in Aroostook county and then in Downtown Lewiston in 2024. This Summit continues to bring presenters and attendees from across the State of Maine for a daylong event; foster personal and professional development, exploration of communities, and spending resulting in economic growth.

Active engagement and participation within the Realize Maine Network regional groups have afforded numerous opportunities to members to become more involved in their communities in both civic and professional endeavors. For example, Chairs of several groups went on to chair or serve on their local Chamber's board of directors, and many of our members are asked to join various boards and committees, allowing them to showcase the leadership skills and trust they have developed while directly engaging and involving them in the community.

With Maine's aging workforce continuing to be on the brink of retirement and both younger and aged families resettling in Maine, we have the opportunity to negate the impact as much as possible with this focused, preemptive effort to empower, engage and provide the opportunity for Maine's future leaders to do what they need to do, lead.

This investment pays in rich dividends to our regions across the state working together to build on the overall goal to make Maine the destination to live, work, and play. Your support of Maine Development Foundation is vital to the continuation of the success of these efforts continuing over the next two years. Thank you for your time today and for the critical support you provide in our efforts.

Respectfully,

Matthew D. Shaw

*Chair, Realize Maine Network Steering Committee*

**Maine Development Foundation**

(207) 754-1516