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***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government***

***RE: LD 258 – Biennial Budget Proposal for the Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation
and the Future and Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS)
Information Services***

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of two areas of the proposed biennial budget - the Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future and the Information Services budget within the Department of Administrative and Financial Services.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (Z135, page A-289)

TNC has worked in close collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (GOPIF). Our State Director, Kate Dempsey, served on the Maine Climate Council and many of our staff served on the Climate Council Working Groups. Our organization works with both coastal and inland communities to support climate resilience planning and investments. We are pleased to see this work in action in the GOPIF budget proposal.

Specifically, we support the increased funding proposed for the Community Resilience Partnership (CRP) Program. The recently released annual report for the program demonstrates an outstanding record of success over just a short time. Since the program was announced in 2021, 131 cities, towns, and Tribal governments have participated in the program either on their own or through regional coalitions. To support these participants, CRP awarded \$4.65M during two grant rounds. This incredible success demonstrates the popularity and need for this work, and we strongly support continued investment in this program.

Additionally, the GOPIF budget proposal establishes one new staff position to manage the Community Resilience Partnership Program. As the programs grows, it is important to invest in staff capacity to continue to provide high quality support for the communities that are enrolled and participating. TNC fully supports the addition of a new staff member to support the CRP.

**Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) – Information Services
(0155, page A-29)**

The DAFS Office of Information Technology manages and provides enterprise information services throughout state government. These services include Geospatial mapping. The budget proposal establishes two new staff positions to serve these needs – one Public Service Coordinator I position and one System Analyst position to serve Geospatial mapping needs. Additionally, the proposal provides funding for acquiring spatial data including high resolution aerial images. Accurate, high resolution Geographic information, including aerial imagery, landcover data, and lidar-based elevation models are absolutely key to decision making and planning across all sectors in Maine. Private industry, town governments, state agencies, non-profits, and private citizens rely on these data and services. The Maine Office of GIS and the Geolibrary provide an essential service in the acquisition, analysis, and distribution of this information and knowledge. TNC and our partners specifically rely on the up-to-date accurate geospatial information the state provides for planning for land and water conservation, decision support tools, and climate change adaptation and mitigation planning. TNC supports increased, long term funding for staff and programs for Geospatial data, acquisition, and analysis.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of these two important budget areas.