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***Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry***

***RE: LD 1274 - An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations***

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, 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 LD 1274, An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations.**

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 working 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.

Our organization has come to understand that centering equity in our work is critical to achieving TNC's vision of a world where "the diversity of life thrives". Conservation does not happen in a vacuum. The work of conserving natural places inevitably intersects with and affects human communities in ways that create both benefits and burdens. As conservationists and as people, it is our responsibility to understand the full range of these impacts—especially the burdens they impose on communities that have historically experienced oppression and marginalization, and still do today. By cultivating our understanding of racial equity, including how a white-dominant mindset has shaped TNC and traditional conservation priorities and decisions, we will deepen our engagement with all communities and generate better conservation outcomes for people and nature.

TNC has committed to continually identifying and seizing opportunities to understand, check, surrender, share, and use our power to increase equity. One of our strategies for connecting people with nature includes, "Working with communities to promote lasting economic prosperity through natural solutions and community driven sustainability." LD 1274 aims to support a community driven solution for economic prosperity through access to farming - both through land access and skill building resources.

We urge the committee to support LD1274 and thank Senator Hickman for his leadership in sponsoring and bringing this bill before you. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.