



**Testimony of Abby Farnham, Assistant Director, Policy and Research, Maine Farmland Trust, to
the 131st Legislature's Joint Select Committee on Housing
May 9, 2023**

Good morning Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Abby Farnham and I am providing testimony on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of LD 1787, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Statutes*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect more than 330 farms and keep nearly 60,000 acres of farmland in farming. In 2022 alone, MFT supported 48 farm businesses with workshops, technical assistance, and grants – delivering over 680 hours of technical assistance and \$309,000 in business and seed grants to help businesses grow their profitability. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

Protecting farmland in Maine is a principal part of our mission because we believe it is essential for ensuring that we have the land base to grow our agricultural economy, particularly as more farmers reach retirement age and development pressures increase across the state. Protecting land is also a key natural climate solution by avoiding the greater emissions associated with developed land, by providing the land base to grow our local and regional food economy and create greater food security for our state, and by preserving the climate benefits that can result from farmers using climate smart practices on the land. However, Maine's farmland is a precious and limited resource. The 2017 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2012 and 2017, Maine lost more than 10 percent of its farmland, over 146,000 acres¹—making Maine one of the top five states in the country with the highest percentage of farmland lost, according to American Farmland Trust.² Maine's farmland is at risk from all types of development, including low-density residential development, which fragments the agricultural land base and threatens the viability of an area's remaining working farms.³

¹ In 2012, Maine had 1,454,104 acres in farmland, but by 2017 that number had dropped to 1,307,566 acres – a loss of 146,491 acres or 10% of Maine's farmland. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), *U.S. Census of Agriculture for 2017*, Maine, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Maine/mev1.pdf.

² American Farmland Trust, "2017 Census of Agriculture," <https://farmlandinfo.org/2017-census-of-agriculture/>

³ American Farmland Trust, (2020) *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*, "Agricultural Land Conversion Highlight Summary: Maine."

MFT supports LD 1787 because it proposes a stakeholder engagement process to review and modernize Maine's subdivision statutes in order to better encourage development in growth areas and reduce development pressure in rural areas. While housing for farmers and farmworkers is important to the viability of Maine's agricultural sector, it is critical that land use laws support the need for additional housing, particularly affordable housing, alongside the need to protect our state's working farms and agricultural lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1787.