



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on State and Local Government
From: Matt Cannon, Sierra Club Maine
Date: 5/15/2023
Re: Testimony in favor of LD 1934: Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, I live in Portland, and I am testifying on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. To that end, we urge you to vote 'Ought to Pass' for LD 1934.

The planning function of state government was greatly reduced in the previous administration, but the need is still there. Governor Mills took the necessary step to maintain some comprehensive planning and coordination functions under the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future (GOPIF). Since then, GOPIF has been hugely beneficial to state government, particularly in its role organizing and supporting the Climate Council.

However, even with extremely dedicated and hardworking staff, it is evident that the state still lacks clear, comprehensive planning capacity, which is critical to developing Maine sustainably. As we face a climate crisis, changing migration patterns, loss of farmland, sprawling development, and the need to preserve 30% of our lands and waters (and beyond) as outlined in the 'Maine Won't Wait' Climate Action Plan, Maine needs to restructure its planning capacity.

Planning is the intersection of so many competing (and necessary) land use issues: Smart Growth development; funding more public transportation; protecting more farmland; building renewable energy; and creating more housing requires intersectional coordination. These are cross departmental issues, and the future of Maine's character is at stake. The status quo cannot continue, we need more coordinated, visionary support for local governments, regional planning entities and our other statewide efforts. This Resolve simply requires GOPIF to review and report on the best path forward.

LD 1934 creates comprehensive input on a timely deadline, by the end of 2023. Though we look forward to seeing the final report, a few important things could be achieved through this process:

- Learning from best practices from other states
- Focus on more robust regional planning
- Better communication, less confusion, redundancy at the state level for employees and members of the public

- a clearer vision for how Maine focuses on smart growth principles, transportation planning, conservation efforts, etc.

As we work to establish a stronger land use planning structure at the state level, we also think it is important to prioritize outcomes-based planning. To that end, we, alongside GrowSmart Maine and Build Maine suggest the following modifications to the bill:

- Expand the language to include not just planning grants and technical assistance, but also implementation and project funding. This will create stronger support for critical local implementation projects that require state coordination across agencies and with municipalities in order to get off the ground.
- Align not just program funding, but also regulatory processes, such as MaineDOT Traffic Movement Permits, DEP Site Location of Development Review, Stormwater permits, and other state level regulatory controls to prioritize critical projects that respond to state and local goals to help advance shared goals and projects.

Last, as part of the stakeholder consultation, we suggest GOPIF also consult with other states (like OR and MD) as well as other research based organizations for more input.

We thank Rep. Sachs for bringing this forward, and we urge your support of this Resolve.

Sincerely,

Matt Cannon
State Conservation & Energy Director
Sierra Club Maine