



Testimony in Support

Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine (LD 1934)

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Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Pete Didisheim. I am the Advocacy Director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading environmental advocacy organization with more than 25,000 members and supporters. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1934.

Maine's cities and towns face growing challenges as they seek to strengthen their local economies, maintain the character of their communities, attract new residents, strengthen their workforce, manage growth pressures, address risks associated with climate change, and balance a broad range of competing interests that will affect their futures.

Currently, the State provides technical assistance and planning grants to Maine communities to address many of these challenges, but this support is disjointed and not as coordinated as it could be, and as it once was.

For nearly 45 years, from 1968 until 2012, Maine had a State Planning Office (SPO), with a broad range of responsibilities, including identifying and analyzing trends and challenges facing the state and our natural resources; coordinating economic and natural resource policy development and implementation across state agencies; and providing technical support to towns and regions to help address a broad range of challenges caused by development and economic issues.

SPO was created by the Legislature as part of the Executive Branch to help build a sustainable future for Maine's communities, businesses, and residents, with a primary focus on resource assessment and planning. In a state where the health of our environment and economy are so tightly connected, SPO sat at the nexus of many critical issues affecting the character of our state. As its title announced, SPO was in the business of helping Maine plan for our future. Planning is important work.

As Yogi Berra once said: "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else."

In 2011, SPO was dismantled and its functions and staff were dispersed, downsized, or simply terminated. NRCM opposed SPO's dismantlement, and we continue to believe that its demise was unfortunate, but we recognize that SPO will not be put back together again.

We do believe, however, that a conversation is needed, as proposed by LD 1934, focused on how the State can do a better job coordinating and implementing planning grants and technical assistance to communities – functions that once were performed by SPO. We support this resolve that directs the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future to review existing programs, staffing, coordination, organizational structures, and budget issues associated with the State's grants and technical assistance to municipalities.

I appreciate this opportunity to provide this testimony on LD 1934 and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.