

Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support of

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

May 25, 2023

Sen. Nangle, Rep. Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Rebecca Lambert, and I am testifying today in support of LD 1934 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association's (MMA) elected 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC).

From 1968 through 2012, municipalities across Maine, specifically the smallest communities, experienced the benefit of the Maine State Planning Office (SPO) through four core duties specified through legislation. These included coordinating the development of the state's economy and energy resources with the conservation of its natural resources; providing technical assistance to the Governor and Legislature by undertaking special studies and plans and preparing policy alternatives; providing technical assistance to towns and regions; and conducting continuing economic analyses, including economic forecasting.

The abolishment of the SPO not only eliminated a significant resource for municipalities, but also created a dramatic shift from being a program created to assist municipalities in meeting state policy goals to a regulatory authority, spread among multiple state agencies, that at times fails to recognize local capacity when enacting planning-related mandates.

As a result, there is a significant need among state departments who design rules and obligations that are carried out at the municipal level to have some sort of coordinating entity which will become more important as the state rolls forward with climate, housing, and land use goals.

An example of this can be seen when looking at water and land regulations with the regulatory entities spread through multiple different departments within the state. Water protection activities by municipalities must meet regulation requirements from the Department of Environmental Protection's Land and Water bureaus, and in some instances the Department of Marine Resources and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and Department of Transportation, as well.

Communication can get challenging between several different entities since at times they are directing municipalities to act in ways that conflict with the directives from another state agency. An entity within state government that could coordinate those demands would help to preemptively identify conflicts, provide clear guidance to municipalities, and enable more effective planning and governance.

Municipal officials spend tremendous amounts of time trying to meet their on the ground obligations, and would not only benefit from a single point source for data but also cross-municipal collaboration between and inside departments at the state level. For these reasons, MMA supports the measures outlined in LD 1934.

Thank you for your time and considering the municipal perspective.