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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 1940, "An Act to Promote Consistent Policies within Growth
Management Programs in Order to Increase Food Security and Economic Resiliency in
Local Communities"**

January 12, 2024

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere and Honorable Members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes. I am sorry I cannot join you today, and have instead submitted this testimony online.

We believe that LD 1640 aligns well with the goals of [Policy Action 2023](#), for which we've been before this committee many times in the past twelve months. As you know, the goal of this set of proposals is to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas.

This bill also brings forward priorities from our [Planning for Ag](#) programming to protect farmland and promote farmland viability. In this bill, the sponsor

- promotes alignment of policies with regulations, fees, and more so that the overall intent of the comprehensive plan will be achieved.
- ensures that communities consider food security and economic resilience, what we would refer to as farm viability,
- encourages a lessening of outdated parking requirements in downtowns to remove one barrier to redevelopment of upper floors in downtowns for housing, thus pulling development pressure away from Maine's farmland.

Perhaps you are not aware of the alarming rate of farmland loss in Maine and across America. ***Maine lost almost 150,000 acres or 10% of its farmland between 2012 and 2017.*** AFT estimates that about two thirds of farmland loss is due to "low density residential development," or sprawl. You can learn more about this on the American Farmland Trust website:

<https://farmland.org/project/farms-under-threat/>

Addressing the housing crisis must be done without undoing the good work to address the climate crisis, and without creating the next crisis of access to farmland and food. LD 1640 provides specific mechanisms toward this goal.

With gratitude,

CEO

GrowSmart Maine