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Maine's Rural Development Council

**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 2214, Supplemental Budget, Parts DD and EE**

March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Senator Nangle, Representative Sachs, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and State and Local Government,

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 supporting smart growth practices and outcomes.

GrowSmart partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that began two years ago, and has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. [Policy Action 2023](#) resulted in sixteen proposals from eight working groups, all addressing the shared goal, ***“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. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.”***

It is from this perspective that GrowSmart Maine supports Parts DD and EE of the Supplemental Budget.

Part DD Creation of the Office of Community Affairs with a Director The Office will foster communication and partnerships between the State and communities in Maine by engaging with towns, cities, Tribal Governments, and regional entities to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance, and financial support. The impact will be statewide, with more effective planning and implementation of solutions; creating more resilient communities. This capacity has been sorely lacking in Maine and we are excited to support this proposal within the supplemental budget.

This First-Stop/No-Wrong-Door access point for municipalities, regional entities, and Tribes is comparable to [211Maine](#) for people facing immediate needs, and DECD's [Business Answers](#) to assist new and existing businesses. Local and regional governments also deserve reduced-barrier access to and improved coordination of resources. For this reason, we suggest a more appropriate name would be the Office of Community Resources.

We support as well the intention of this Office to guide a future reorganization of certain existing programs from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Department of Marine Resources, the Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Department of Public Safety. To house these resources under one umbrella further forges an easily accessible path to technical assistance and resources related to planning, conservation, and development, which in turn improves fiscal outcomes and increases community resilience.

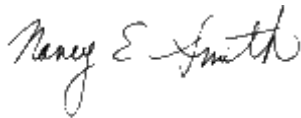
Part EE: Transfer of \$5M to the Community Resilience Partnership GrowSmart Maine is working with several small municipalities which don't have the staff or financial capacity to plan for the impact of flooding and other climate related disasters. The Community Resilience Partnership has been instrumental in helping towns shift focus from responding to yesterday's disaster to planning for a more resilient future. This program empowers communities to take charge, and to prepare for future climate challenges.

The Community Action Grants offered through the program are strategic investments in resilient infrastructure that save tax-dollars in the long term. The program also helps Maine's rural municipalities access additional state and federal funds that otherwise would go solely to communities with significant resources and capacity.

The fact that so many communities across Maine have already enrolled in the program is a testament to its success and GrowSmart Maine welcomes its continued growth with the proposed \$5 million allocated in the supplemental budget.

Parts DD and EE reduce barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens all communities in Maine.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy E. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'S' at the end.

CEO

GrowSmart Maine