

Testimony of the Town of Norway in Support of full funding for the establishment of the Office of Community Affairs, contained in the Governor's supplemental budget.

*a part of LD 2214 An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*

Hearing Date: March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee: I, Chris Bilodeau, Code Enforcement Officer of the Town of Norway, urge you to approve the establishment of the Office of Community Affairs, contained in the Governor's supplemental budget.

The Town of Norway has been a member of AVCOG for many years and relies upon the technical assistance they provide in land use, environmental/resiliency, economic development, and transportation planning to meet the needs and goals of the town. The complex nature of the various challenges that towns are currently facing requires additional planning, expertise, and funding to address them.

As proposed, the creation of the Office of Community Affairs will align existing state programs and resources to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance, and financial support to towns, cities, Tribal governments, and regional entities to better plan for common challenges, pursue solutions, and create stronger, more resilient communities. We see this as a positive step toward expanding planning efforts in the state in a coordinated and efficient way that will allow our town to undertake efforts that wouldn't be possible without this much needed technical assistance.

The complexity of housing, land use, and resiliency demands greater coordination across state agencies to maximize unprecedented federal funding opportunities that now exist. In order for small rural towns like ours to pursue these funding opportunities, there needs to be more coordination of resources, so we are not required to work with multiple agencies and try to figure out the various requirements of funding opportunities. We do not have the resources or expertise to navigate through this on our own. The establishment of an office to coordinate with towns and regional organizations such as AVCOG will assist in making that possible.

We see this as a way to provide towns with a roadmap to pursue comprehensive solutions that benefit Maine's people, economy, and environment. Increased communication between State, regional and municipal entities will allow the Town of Norway to receive continued support in reaching our goals and tackling complex issues. I encourage the passage of this proposal in the supplemental budget.

