

March 1, 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations & Financial Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Support for LD 2214, Part EE of *An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government*

Dear Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Sachs, and members of the Appropriations Committee;

Please accept this letter as the testimony of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) in support LD 2214, Part EE, which transfers \$5,000,000 to the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to fund expansion of GOPIF's Community Resilience Partnership (CRP). These new funds will support grants and technical assistance to Maine municipalities and tribes for climate planning and actions, including adaptation and resilience projects, as well as emissions reduction initiatives including clean energy and energy efficiency projects.

GPCOG serves 25 municipal members in Cumberland County, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, as well as Saco, Biddeford, Arundel, and Old Orchard Beach through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS). We deliver transportation, land use, sustainability, and economic development services to our members and their communities, and we collaborate with many state agencies in our work.

GPCOG strongly supports LD 2214, Part EE because the climate crisis is moving fast, and it is happening now. Municipalities are on the front lines of responding, and they need help protecting lives and livelihoods in their communities. The storms we have seen in the last two years have strengthened their resolve and focused their efforts, but they cannot do it alone. There is robust federal funding, but accessing it is getting harder and harder for municipalities. Smaller towns are at a particular disadvantage, but even for large cities there are barriers that prevent access to meaningful funding. For most of our municipal members the CRP program is one of only 2-3 options of grant programs, State or Federal, that can fund climate action priorities.

I was hired in 2020 to support our members in responding to the climate crisis. At the time South Portland and Portland were the only communities leading on climate action. Now, just 4 years later, there are 5 additional communities with professional Climate Action Plans complete or in progress, we have 19 communities out of 25 enrolled in the Partnership, and our region has received over \$700,000 in grant support for their priority projects. **The program is working, but more funding is essential to its continued success.**

The CRP program has spurred conversations across the State that are moving the needle on mitigating emissions and building resilience. The program's design allows communities of all types to access it

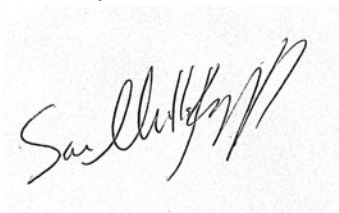
because the barriers are low, and the funding is flexible. As communities progress through the phases of climate action, expanded and increased funding amounts will be crucial to achieving Maine Won't Wait's ambitious emission reduction targets and resilience goals. Many communities are currently completing planning projects and low-hanging efficiency upgrades. As planning is complete, more complex projects and approaches will be needed.

The CRP has moved communities towards action, even communities that may be hesitant to talk about climate change. As impacts from climate change become clearer in their communities, they are motivated to do something. This looks different in every community, as it should. The program is responsive to the unique needs and capacity of our diverse towns and cities.

Please support the Governor's proposal in Part EE to add \$5 million to the CRP so that its good work can continue and expand, not just in our region, but across the entire State.

Thank you for the opportunity to share GPCOG's full support of LD 2214, Part EE, and please let me know if I can provide anything more to support your work on this important part of the Supplemental Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Mills-Knapp", is centered below the text. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sara Mills-Knapp
Director of Sustainability
Greater Portland Council of Governments