



# Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters

In Support of LD 2214

*An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change 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*

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee

March 1, 2024

Good day Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn, Director of Government Affairs at Maine Conservation Voters, testifying in support of LD 2214. Maine Conservation Voters is a nonprofit organization with over 13,000 members and supporters committed to protecting our environment, democracy, and climate future.

My testimony focuses on two areas in the Supplemental Budget; the Community Resilience Partnership within the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (found on page 57 in the budget language document) and the creation of the Maine Office of Community Affairs (found on page 53 in the budget language document).

The Community Resilience Partnership was created due to a recommendation of the Maine Climate Council in its Climate Action Plan, entitled *Maine Won't Wait*. The Community Resilience Partnership (CRP) provides resources to communities to help them reduce carbon emissions, transition to clean energy and build resilience to climate change impacts like flooding and sea level rise. This is in response to municipalities citing lack of capacity, expertise, and funding as reasons why they are not able to address climate risks.

Since the inception of the CRP in 2021, 176 cities, towns, and Tribal governments have participated in the partnership, receiving grants to: conduct climate vulnerability studies,

install high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, expand public charging for electric vehicles, transition to renewable energy, and develop resilience plans (an increase of 58 communities since 2022). For example, Lamoine received a \$50,000 Community Action Grant to install a solar array on its salt/sand shed and install heat pumps in the Town Hall and fire station and school. This has saved the town money by lowering heating and cooling costs.

The biennial budget includes \$3 million dollars/year in state grants for climate planning, emission reduction and resilience actions; the supplemental budget includes another \$5 million for the CRP to support local resilience activities (fiscal note Part A page 48). The December storms dramatically increased the need for these funds in localities. Importantly, these dollars can be used to leverage federal funding. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act provide opportunities for climate and energy funding to states, but a state match is often required. Let's build on the success of the CRP and give communities the resources they need to address climate change impacts.

The Maine Office of Community Affairs as proposed in this supplemental budget would support municipalities in a variety of ways; it would create an office and a director (fiscal note Part A page 107) but no new staff beyond that. Existing staff from other offices and agencies would shift and work under this new umbrella. From climate change impacts, to chronic housing shortages, to demands from population growth, Maine communities are facing complex challenges, and many lack local planning and implementation capacity to address them.

Currently, communities must navigate a variety of programs managed across several agencies in order to access technical assistance, planning support, and funding opportunities from the state. They need a one stop solution. Reorganizing state programs that provide technical assistance, planning support, and funding opportunities into a single office would better support Maine communities as they navigate these increasingly complex challenges.

For these reasons, please approve these supplemental budget requests. Thank you for your time and attention.