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**TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS AND
FINANCIAL AFFAIRS, AND HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY PROVIDED IN SUPPORT OF THE MAINE OFFICE OF
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS (MOCA) BIENNIAL BUDGET – PART D**

DATE OF HEARING: FEBRUARY 5, 2025

Honorable Senator Margaret Rotundo, Honorable Representative Drew Gattine, Honorable Senator Chip Curry, Honorable Representative Traci Gere, Distinguished Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Housing and Economic Development Committees:

The Maine Association of Planners (MAP) Legislative Policy Committee (LPC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) and their proposed budget. As the statewide network of professional planners, MAP provides a valuable perspective as practitioners working within and alongside local government on myriad municipal planning and public policy issues and projects in Maine communities of all sizes. MAP strongly supports the formation of the Maine Office of Community Affairs and the approval of their proposed budget for the following reasons:

- **Improved Coordination.** Part D of the budget moves seven (7) existing programs to MOCA, bringing together staff who currently serve communities so the state can provide better service by collaborating across programs. The programs expected to be moved into this new agency (Community Resilience Partnership, Maine Coastal Program, Maine Floodplain Program, Municipal Planning Assistance Program, Housing Opportunity Program, Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code/Code Enforcement) have clear connections to each other and are improved by being together under the MOCA umbrella. Coordination of those efforts, particularly at a time when housing and community economic development are critical to the future of Maine and its residents, will improve communication and coordination, reduce paperwork, and improve the outcomes of those programs.
- **Increased Efficiencies.** By bringing all these programs together, MOCA will be better able to coordinate our work between state and regional organizations to reduce paperwork and create more impact with those grant dollars. MOCA will also be able to provide more



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support for communities that have few or no municipal staff by having a network of staff at the state and regional level who are in close contact with each other and can act as a one-stop-shop.

- **Clarity for Towns.** It can be confusing for communities to know who at the state to call with planning, housing, and economic development questions. MOCA will provide a needed starting point for communities and a connected office where the resources and answers are available.
- **More Effective Structure and Staffing.** The creation of MOCA will not drastically impact the state budget, as the office will be largely composed of existing staff organized together in a more efficient and effective structure. The only new positions in the budget are two administrative positions to support the office with financial management, contracts, reception services, etc. and support for the community grant programs. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF) and the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) budgets contain provisions to make limited period positions in the Municipal Planning Assistance Program and the Housing Opportunity Program permanent so that they can be moved to MOCA in Part D of the budget. By making permanent the limited period positions in MPAP and partnering them with planners in housing, coastal resources, volunteer services, and resilience, as well as functions like code enforcement and floodplain management, MOCA has a much stronger base from which to make progress on updated technical assistance and more integrated, coordinated grant activities.

The budget language also proposes moving the Development Ready Advisory Committee from the Redevelopment Land Bank to MOCA and adjusts the membership and mission. There will be seats on the Committee for regional and municipal entities, as well as many other stakeholders, and it will provide a forum to convene key players, both inside and outside state government, to align policy and to produce consistent, easy-to-use technical assistance for communities.

Sincerely,

The Maine Association of Planners Legislative Policy Committee

