

Testimony on behalf of KV Connect in support of LD 210 *"An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027"*.

February 4, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Max Kenney, professionally I am a project engineer for the Kennebec Water District providing drinking water to the communities of Waterville, Winslow, Fairfield, Benton and Vassalboro. Additionally, I am the 2025 Chair for KV Connect. KV Connect is the greater Waterville region's rising professionals networking organization. We are affiliated with the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Maine Development Foundation's Realize Maine Network of other rising professional groups. KV Connect is awarded merit-based funding from the Maine Development Foundation annually to support our critical work in the Central Maine region. Your support of LD 210 *"An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027"* is crucial to our groups sustained efforts in the coming years.

The easy way to describe KV Connect is to call us a young professionals networking group with a target demographic of Millennials and Gen Zs, aged 21 to 40, living and working in the Central Maine region. While that is true, we do so much more!

When I left a job working for the City of Dover, NH in 2021 and moved back to my hometown of Fairfield, I was seeking the kind of professional networking and career advancement opportunities that were so prevalent in the NH seacoast. Upon learning about KV Connect from a Facebook event, I knew it was a group I wanted to join. The first event I attended was the group's annual "Welcome Home" event in collaboration with Live and Work in Maine. The goal of the event was to welcome new residents and boomerangs, like me, to the greater Waterville region.

It is no secret that the Waterville region has a harder time attracting and retaining younger skilled workers in comparison to more metropolitan regions of Maine. I myself left after high school for "better" professional and social opportunities outside of Maine. The same story goes for many members of my fellow Lawrence High School class of 2012 graduates.

KV Connect has made it our mission to help attract, welcome and retain young people in the greater Waterville area. We offer monthly events for our membership to attend. All of the events are focused on one or more of our key focus areas including; community engagement, professional development/education, outdoor recreation, volunteerism, and family friendly fun.

In 2024, KV Connect partnered with several local businesses and organizations such as; Bricks Co-Working and Innovation Space, Waterville Historical Society, Main Street Skowhegan, United Way Keep ME Warm Fund, Colby College, Children's Discovery Museum of Central Maine, Mainely Brews Restaurant & Brewhouse and many more! Our programming reached an estimated 200 participants who call Central Maine from Albion and Belgrade to Oakland and Clinton home.

At our Canoes and Brews event on the Kennebec River in Skowhegan, in calibration with Main Street Skowhegan's Skowhegan Outdoors program we met a 30-year-old graphic designer named Katie who had recently moved to Skowhegan from Montana for a job with a Maine based engineering firm. Katie explained how hard it had been moving to a new state and trying to establish a network of professional contacts and quite frankly friends. KV Connect welcomed Katie into our group and she has said several times how comforting it has been to have an organization push her to meet new people and feel more connected to her new community.

We have dozens of success stories just like Katie, where KV Connect and the other similar groups in the Realize Maine Network have built community connections and fostered a sense of belonging for new Mainers, previous Mainers coming back to the work force in our state and lifelong Mainers; all who have chosen to make Maine home. Our goal, is to encourage them to continue to contribute to our communities and economy through their professional work, civic engagement, volunteerism and recreation.

KV Connect works really hard to put on low cost or no cost events to break down the financial barriers that may exist and prevent members of the community from participating in our events. We do what we can to partner with the business community and seek financial support from them for our programming, but we could not put on our events without the financial support from the Maine Development Foundation. Your support of LD 210 will allow Maine Development Foundation to continue to support KV Connect's mission to build community in the greater Waterville region.

Thank you - we truly appreciate your support of our mission.

Max Kenney
Chair - KV Connect