

February 5, 2025

Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director  
The Nature Conservancy in Maine  
[kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org](mailto:kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org)



***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and  
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development***

***RE: 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***

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to offer written comments in support of one area of the proposed biennial budget - Part "D" related to the Maine Office of Community Affairs.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Proposals related to the Maine Office of Community Affairs can be found in the 2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget - Part D A/A document and starting on page 6 in the 2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget - Language document.

Our organization strongly supports the creation of the Maine Office of Community Affairs and the provisions in the biennial budget to transition several existing programs currently distributed among various agencies into a central hub within the Maine Office of Community Affairs. Bringing programs and staff focused on community resilience, coastal zone and floodplain management, municipal planning, housing, community service, building codes, and more into one central office will increase capacity, coordination and create a one-stop-shop for municipalities looking for critical support.

Municipalities and regional planning organizations across the state are focused on proactive solutions to a wide range of challenges, but they often have limited funding

and capacity. In a survey conducted by TNC and Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI) in 2017, we gathered data from officials in 143 Maine municipalities. More than two-thirds said that inadequate funding was among their top five barriers, while 61 percent ranked lack of staff capacity among their top five barriers.

The work the Maine Legislature and Mills Administration have been doing to improve coordination and planning has been critical and standing up the Maine Office of Community Affairs would build on those efforts. **Any added capacity will help Maine communities make smart planning decisions that facilitate economic growth while protecting natural resources and ensuring resilience to climate change.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment and I am happy to answer questions at any time.