

Testimony in Support of LD 210
Maine Economic Growth Council Biennial Budget (within DECD)

by
Stephen Von Vogt & Honorable Jim Dill, Co- Chairs, Maine Economic Growth Council

February 5, 2025

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS; INNOVATION, DEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT AND BUSINESS:

Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Rotundo and Representative Gattine, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Curry and Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development:

Our names are Stephen Von Vogt, a resident of Portland, Maine, and Rep. James F. Dill, a resident of Old Town, Maine; together we are the private and public sector co-Chairs of the Maine Economic Growth Council. Steve is the president of Maine Marine Composites, an ocean engineering firm in Portland Maine as well as a principal in several companies involved in energy development and the reuse of shuttered industrial facilities in Maine for new purposes and uses. He has been involved on the ground in efforts to develop and redevelop the economy in Maine and is one of the longest serving non-legislative members of the Maine Economic Growth Council. Rep. Dill serves House District 26 and has also served on the Council for many years. Professionally, Jim serves in the UMaine Cooperative Extension Service and directs the Cooperative Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory.

We offer our support for and advocate your support for the budget appropriation for the Economic Growth Council of \$90,395 per year listed on page A-194 of the Governor's proposed biennial budget bill.

To know where you are going, you must know not only where you are today but also where you have come from. The Measures of Growth report, which turned 30 in 2024, is an invaluable guide to policymakers at all levels, helping them to focus their efforts and understand the connections between the major issues affecting the economy and the well-being of Maine people.

Overall, the long-term insights provided by the Measures of Growth are invaluable in magnifying the importance of Maine's workforce, innovation, and connectivity amidst potential challenges and showing the impacts of our longstanding strengths.

The Maine Development Foundation both ably staffs the Council and produces the report. The Council itself is comprised of an incredible group of non-partisan volunteers representing many sectors of the Maine economy, Maine's academic institutions, both houses and parties of the legislature, economic development specialists, trade groups, and other experts. It provides consistent and invaluable benchmarks by which policy makers can guide and steer the economic future of the state. It tells us where we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go. The

report has only gotten better and more useful with each year and will continue to do so if resourced adequately.

Over the past several years, the Council actively participated in developing and then aligning metrics to track Maine's 10-Year Economic Development Strategy developed in 2019 and refreshed in 2024; retained highly credible contracted Maine economists to assemble the *Measures of Growth* data; amplified the measurement of broadband, mental health, racial equity, and climate outcomes, in the report; migrated the *Measures of Growth* to a true digital and mobile-friendly product with a strong user experience for the public rather than one massive pdf file; and added stories of "Indicators in Action" to bring more life to the data.

Last year, we spotlighted even longer-term megatrends across the 30 year period.

The invaluable work of the Council and the constant improvement to the utility of the Measures of Growth for policymakers and the public should be worthy of adequate public funding as proposed. With this support, we and MDF can continue to ensure the Council work products remain contemporary, evolving, and go deep on the economic issues of our time.

We know the Legislature has been appreciative of the work of the Council and the value of *Measures of Growth*. We urge you to continue this fine work and support the budget appropriation. Thank you.

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