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Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

LD 247—An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the State

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Karen Blakelock and I am a policy advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 247, An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Places Names in the State.**

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 both nature and people can thrive. 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.

TNC supports creating the Maine Board on Place Names to establish policies and procedures for naming and renaming places in the state, and to serve as an advisor with specific historical and cultural expertise to units of local government seeking to name or rename a place. As a large landowner, TNC has undertaken efforts to review names across our preserves, and we know firsthand that it can be difficult to research historical place names, and even more complex to convene the interested parties to consider name change proposals. The USGS Bureau of Place Names leads processes for examining place name inquiries, assembling interested parties, and deliberating fairly on potential changes. A state naming authority could work closely with the USGS to better understand and parse the local nuances and history and help communities to understand and move through requests in an expedited fashion relative to a national process.

The Nature Conservancy in Maine believes that LD 247 is a small but meaningful step towards supporting the voice, choice, and action of Indigenous Peoples, which is key to our vision of a world where people and nature thrive. Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by the Wabanaki Tribes and other marginalized groups. We acknowledge the urgency of addressing these injustices and support meaningful action in this direction. Including Tribal input on the Maine Board on Place Names, as well as members with historical, linguistic, and anthropological expertise provides an opportunity to learn more accurately about the history of places across Maine and examine potential name changes where appropriate and warranted.

We urge this committee to support LD 247. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.