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Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

RE: LD 307—Resolve, to Establish the Maine Artificial Intelligence Data Center Coordination Council

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Karen Blakelock, and I work as the energy policy advisor for the Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to comment in support of LD 307.

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 people and nature can thrive. We work in more than 70 countries and use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

TNC supports this legislation for several reasons:

- ❖ LD 307 identifies the objectives of the council to be protecting ratepayers, maintaining electric grid reliability, minimizing environmental impacts, and enabling responsible and appropriately sited economic development. The proposed language also directs the council to consider the State's policy goals related to renewable energy, greenhouse gas reduction objectives, as well as goals for economic development and broadband buildout. TNC agrees that these are all appropriate and necessary objectives for the council.
- ❖ Bullet 7 and 8 directs the council to assist municipalities in assessing potential AI data center impacts and benefits, and to develop recommendations to clarify roles, responsibilities, and more. Clarity for municipalities as well as between state agencies and departments of government will be hugely helpful for communities that are faced with the question of whether or not to allow an AI data center in their town.
- ❖ Lastly, we appreciate that the sponsor of this bill has reserved a seat on the council for a representative from an environmental advocacy organization as environmental groups can often offer additional capacity and scientific expertise, such as mapping and siting, and have expertise in crafting mitigation plans for development where certain impacts to natural areas cannot be avoided. The Nature Conservancy has significant expertise in this field, as do several other environmental advocacy organizations in Maine. The Nature Conservancy's North America program has already developed guidance for the responsible siting of AI data centers and suggestions to reduce negative impacts from data center energy-use and would be happy to share this research with this committee and with the council if that would be helpful.

TNC would also like to offer some friendly suggestions that we believe would strengthen the council. Specifically, we recommend expanding the membership of the council to include additional interests from natural resource professionals such a representative from the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) and, if possible, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (Dacf). We would also suggest that bullet number 5 should specifically reference creation of data center siting guidelines that address wildlife and habitat fragmentation.

Thank you for the time, I ask that you **vote ought to pass on LD 307**, and I am happy to answer any questions now or in the future.