BICYCLE COALITION OF MAINE

February 7, 2023

Testimony in Support of LD 256
An Act to Add Electric Bicycles to the Electric Vehicle Rebate Program

Greetings members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. I am James Tassé, Assistant Director for the BCM, and this testimony is submitted on behalf of the Bicycle Coalition of Maine. The Coalition supports **LD 256, "An Act to Add Electric Bicycles to the Electric Vehicle Rebate Program,"** and recommends that the committee issue an "ought to pass" report on this bill.

As a leading statewide organization advocating for access to active transportation opportunities for all pedestrians and people on bicycles, we support this bill, which will provide greater access to electric-assist bicycles for transportation purposes.

As you may know, E-bikes, which are regulated in Maine in Title 29A, Chapter 19, Section 2063, Paragraph 14, are a transportation option that has been exploding in popularity across the country. There are 3 classes of e-bike, and all provide assistance when the rider pedals. The top speed of e-bikes is 28mph, and the rider has to be pedaling to get the motor assistance on Class 1 and Class 3 e-bikes (Class 2s also have a throttle, in addition to pedal assist). **E-bikes provide effective, reliable transportation within a 5-10 miles radius of a person's home, which is the the range that more than 75% of car trips in Maine fall within. Cargo e-bicycles permit groceries, goods, and children to be easily transported, and commuter specific models provide a great workforce option** (BCM is in fact partnering with the Departments of Transportation and Labor on a pilot program for workforce transportation in select areas).

Broadly, an e-bike rebate program would make this technology more available to more people, and could help low income folks in particular achieve mobility goals at a much lower cost than car ownership. E-bikes are also a part of the solution for reducing global warming emissions, making streets safer, and reimagining community design so it's more human scale.

Similar programs exist in several states across the country. Vermont's program found that "E-bikes are much more efficient than electric or conventional cars" and "were shown to displace meaningful amounts of driving miles. On average, e-bike owners displaced 760 driving miles annually."

In Maine, South Portland launched an e-bike rebate program last summer, and Portland is developing a program for launch this year. These programs serve the largest metro area, but Maine needs a statewide program to ensure that rural residents also have access to the benefits provided by e-bikes.

While we do not intend to provide detailed guidance for the implementation of this program at this time, we make the following broad recommendations as elements that the bill should be amended to include:
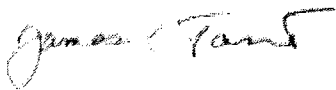
- The program should include income eligibility requirements to ensure that the rebates incentivize persons who might not otherwise make the purchase. We recommend that persons making up to the median income level in Maine receive a $1500 rebate, while persons making above the median income receive a $750 credit.

- The program should require that people buy bicycles through bicycle shops to support local businesses and to ensure that the bikes are properly assembled and maintained.

- The program should emphasize cargo and utilitarian/commuter e-bikes.

- The Efficiency Maine Trust should dedicate $500,000 to this program. These programs have proven very popular elsewhere, and under-funded programs rapidly have exhausted their funding. Vermont ran through $100,000 in less than two months.

The Bicycle Coalition of Maine is at your service to assist with drafting amendments that shape this policy. We are also willing to arrange an e-bike demo day so that any members of the committee that are not familiar with e-bikes can experience for themselves the transformative capabilities of this new technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 256.

On behalf of the Bicycle Coalition of Maine,

Sincerely,

James C. Tassé, PhD
Assistant Director