

Testimony of the Greater Portland Council of Governments in Support of
DECD's Housing Opportunity Program
a part of LD 258, *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and
Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023,
June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025.*

February 9, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, I am Kristina Egan, Executive Director of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG). I am here today to speak in strong support of full funding for DECD's Housing Opportunity Program, contained in the Governor's biennial budget.

GPCOG serves thirty municipal members, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, and the County of Cumberland, encompassing a population of over a quarter million people. We staff the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization which allocates over \$30 million dollars annually in federal transportation funds – and during the pandemic over three times that amount - to regional priority highway and public transportation projects, extending our service territory into York County, including Saco and Biddeford.

GPCOG also serves as the Portland region's Economic Development District, as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and we support numerous statewide programs like Maine Clean Communities for cleaner transportation and the Maine Broadband Coalition dedicated to universal access to high speed internet. We also provide tailored services to cities and towns – our members – to meet the ever-changing needs of our member communities, which today include a housing shortage of major proportions.

In the Fall of 2021 GPCOG urged the *Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions* to include a recommendation to provide resources to regional planning organizations so they could effectively and efficiently help municipalities implement strategies to expand housing supply, access, and affordability.

We were pleased and grateful that the Commission made that recommendation, and we were encouraged that last year's LD 2003 incorporated funding to regional planning organizations for regional technical assistance on housing. We were also grateful that last Fall, the *Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Land Use Regulations and Short-term Rentals*

Helping communities thrive and prosper in the Greater Portland and Lakes Region

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made another recommendation for expanded regional technical assistance funding in the wake of LD 2003's passage.

Today I am here to say again how important regional implementation is for the success of state housing policies.

Land use policy changes are complex undertakings that many of our communities cannot successfully complete without adequate support. Regional planning agencies have expertise, local knowledge, existing trusted relationships, and the ability to help their municipalities expand housing choices in ways that meet the needs of our current and future workforce.

The funding contained in the Governor's budget will enable DECD to implement its Housing Opportunity Program through the work of regional planning agencies like GPCOG, together with many other qualified regional planning organizations and service providers around the state.

With full funding we are confident that our municipal members will have the support they need to implement housing policies that make meaningful progress toward solving our regional, and state, housing shortage. Without this funding, every regional planning agency will be severely limited in their capacity to be effective, efficient implementing partners with the state on this high priority issue.

For all these reasons we urge you to vote to support full funding for DECD's Housing Opportunity Program as proposed in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and please let me know if GPCOG can help you with your important work on the Governor's budget, and the implementation of state housing policies.