

Testimony in Support of LD 258
Maine Economic Growth Council Biennial Budget (within DECD)

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

February 15, 2023

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

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

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-204 of the Governor's proposed biennial budget bill. First, we note our gratitude to the prior Legislature and Governor Mills for increasing the annual funding from \$55k per year beginning in FY21-22. This is important work, but the quality and scope of the work had grown dependent over the years on relying unsustainably on the commitment of our partner, Maine Development Foundation, to fundraise or subsidize the core products. The supplemental funding restored strong, sustainable footing.

To know where you are going, you must know where you are today and where you have come from. The Measures of Growth report is a valuable guide to policymakers at all levels, helping them to focus their efforts and understand the connections between and among 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 still invaluable because the extreme short-term disruptions like recessions and pandemic magnify the importance of Maine's workforce, innovation, and connectivity -- and show the impacts of both our longstanding strengths and our most notable challenges on shaping the recession and our path forward.

The Council is staffed by and the report is produced by the Maine Development Foundation and is overseen by an incredible group of non-partisan individuals comprised of representatives of many sectors of the Maine economy, Maine's academic institutions, both houses and parties of the legislature, economic development, trade groups and 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. It is an incredible value delivered by volunteers in the interest of the economy of the State of Maine. It is consistent and well-produced under the guidance of the Maine Development Foundation – and it has only gotten better and more useful and can continue to do so if resourced adequately.

Over the past three years, the Council actively participated in developing and then aligning metrics to track Maine's 10-Year Economic Development Strategy developed in 2019; retained highly credible contracted Maine economists to assemble the *Measures of Growth* data; amplified the measurement of racial equity, climate outcomes, broadband, and mental health in the report; and most recently, 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.

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 deeper 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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