

March 1, 2023

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*Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs*

*RE: LD 258 – Biennial Budget Proposal*

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, we appreciate this opportunity to **support the budget proposal for the Governor’s Energy Office (GEO)**.

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 nature and people can thrive together. 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. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

The GEO is leading the charge in fighting climate change in a way that supports Maine’s ratepayers, businesses, and environment. They have worked to help our state become a leader in renewable energy and have strongly positioned it to be a national leader in the offshore wind thanks to the critical funding the legislature has provided for Maine’s groundbreaking offshore wind research array.

Beyond this work, they have led task forces, published reports, and led stakeholder groups to ensure we use innovative and unique solutions to address climate change. TNC has been honored to be a part of this office’s ambitious and thoughtful process over the past years.

The \$1 million for the research consortium continues funding from last year’s creation of the consortium in legislation and is crucial to support the ongoing work. The \$500,000 in ongoing funding for GEO is critical to funding operations, ongoing studies/policy work, and maximizing federal funding.

We thank Governor Mills and Director Burgess for putting forward this budget proposal, and we strongly urge the Committee’s support.