

Cultural Alliance of Maine

*Learning, connecting, making visible, and
building public support across our cultural sectors.*

April 26, 2023

TO: Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and honorable members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee

RE: SUPPORT LD 912: An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Restore Historic Community Buildings

The Cultural Alliance of Maine is a statewide organization devoted to increasing the visibility and capacity of Maine's cultural sector - our libraries, historical societies, historic preservation groups, museums, arts organizations, theaters, among others. We directly serve the thousands of Mainers statewide who work in our historic and cultural spaces and activities, and the hundreds of thousands more who benefit from the cultural sector year-round. Our Alliance is devoted to ensuring we, as a state, are adequately celebrating, promoting, and supporting the creative, cultural, and historic places and spaces that make Maine a place we want to live.

We urge you to **support the bond LD 912** to direct much-needed funding into restoring historic community buildings. This bond represents a long-term investment in the historic buildings that are the backbone of our State's heritage - aka, an investment in our **cultural infrastructure**.

Why cultural infrastructure?

Cultural infrastructure provides direct and indirect benefits for Maine's economy and social well-being. It reduces isolation among our state's aging population; improves education outcomes for youth; and increases pride of place and mental health for members of our communities. Cultural infrastructure, like our roads and bridges, also plays an enormous role in economic development - especially in our rural communities. **America's healthiest, prospering communities know that funding for cultural and creative sectors is an investment, not a cost.**

Cultural infrastructure is a highly effective tool for regional development and regeneration. Our state's economy depends on attracting 75,000 members to our workforce in the coming decade or so. It relies on our young people deciding to stay here after graduation, or at least moving back after a few years of experience out of state. We need skilled professionals who *could* work in more densely populated parts of the country but instead choose Maine's rural communities where a number of cutting-edge industries are poised to take off, alongside our existing industries which are desperate for workers. We have an outstanding quality of life, but we need to adopt a competition mindset as a place to settle down. **Two-thirds of young people choose a place to live before they choose a job**, and we need them to choose Maine knowing we have the cultural infrastructure they're looking for to stay inspired, connected,

socially engaged, and grounded in Maine's cultural heritage and creative excellence. And those of us already here need that, too.

Why state funding?

A handful of organizations have major philanthropists supporting them, but by and large our cultural sector is underfunded, struggling and desperately needs capital investment. These funds will infuse eligible organizations with funding that will help keep arts, culture, heritage and humanities alive, especially in rural and underserved areas where philanthropy is scarce.

Our state's cultural sector is extremely resilient, adaptive, and thrifty when it comes to annual operations. Many organizations preserving our historic materials, providing community gathering space, and producing creative and inspiring programming are doing so with **few, or no, paid staff**. When it comes to essential, but expensive one-time costs associated with capital improvements - repairing roofs, adding ramps, dealing with the wear-and-tear, damage, or degradation from our state's harsh winters and increasingly erratic weather patterns - it can be nearly impossible to find the funds. This is especially true in our rural communities, and for our historical societies and small museums that protect the lion's share of Maine's historical materials and objects.

As with so many aspects of community life in Maine, our cultural sector is proudly local and self-sufficient. Yet there comes a time when we must acknowledge that State government has an essential role to play in ensuring our decentralized, independent tradition of cultural heritage and artistic expression remains sustainable. The way to do this is by approving these bonds to ensure our historic buildings are safe, dry, and ready to serve our communities and tell our stories.

We appreciate the ability to provide this testimony in strong support of **LD 912**. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and support to this legislation.

Sincerely,

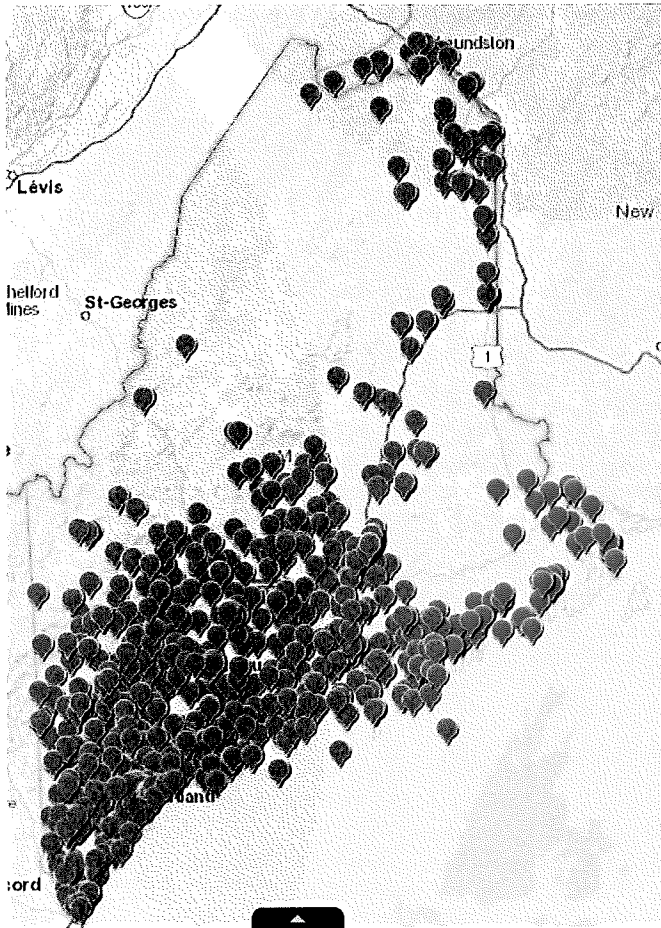
Mollie Cashwell

Director

Ekhlas Ahmed

Program Director

Where is our Cultural Infrastructure in Maine?



This map, developed by the **Cultural Emergency Resource Coalition (CERC)**, shows the locations of organizations in Maine that collect and maintain cultural assets and make them available to the public (e.g. books, historical objects, art work, archival collections, etc.)

The map is built on data gathered by the Association Maine Archives and Museums (MAM) in their Maine Cultural Institutions Outreach Project. The original data gathered by the project is available as a spreadsheet on the MAM web site linked below.

The institutions include **libraries, museums, historical societies, research entities that have collections, and historic lighthouses** among others.

Learn more and see the interactive map at www.mainemuseums.org/MCIOP.

For more information about growing our state's workforce and supporting rural community development, visit:

www.culturalmaine.org/whymaineculture

Mailing Address: % Maine Association of Nonprofits, 565 Congress Street, Suite 301, Portland, ME 04101

www.culturalmaine.org

info@culturalmaine.org