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2023

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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine  
In support of LD 1634, An Act to Grant Municipalities the Authority to Set  
Certain Lower Motor Vehicle Speed Limits Without a Department of  
Transportation Speed Study**

April 25, 2023

Senator Chipman, Representative Williams, and Honorable Members of the Joint  
Standing Committee on Transportation,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

We have partnered with Build Maine to guide a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy proposals that began a year ago, and has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine and beyond. This testimony represents the view of Build Maine as well as GrowSmart Maine.

Policy Action 2023 has resulted in sixteen proposals, including this one, from eight working groups, all addressing this goal, ***“to address barriers to and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes while pulling development pressure away from productive and open natural areas. We do so acknowledging that Maine has urban, rural, and suburban settings for which any solution may or may not be a fit, and a variety of people who deserve to be welcomed to their communities.”***

This bill enables but does not require municipalities to take action more quickly to lower speeds on roads where they are seeing safety issues. Current statute requires a municipality to take over speed limit setting on all streets in order to make a change on one street. The primary benefits of this include:

- a stronger local economy with more active downtowns that feel safe for walking to shops and businesses
- public health benefit of safer, walkable streets where the town determines it makes sense.
- lowering vehicle speeds to help reduce the prevalence of fatalities on our streets.

Please refer to the attached fact sheet for an overview of the positive impacts this proposal will have across Maine. GrowSmart Maine and Build Maine will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

## LD 1634

# An Act to Grant Municipalities the Authority to Set Certain Lower Motor Vehicle Speed Limits Without a Department of Transportation Speed Study

Sponsor: Senator Rick Bennett

Action Working Group #3:

## COMPLETE STREETS ACTION

Point person: Zoe Miller,  
Moving Maine Network  
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### OVERVIEW: What does the bill do?

This bill enables municipalities to have local control and take action more quickly to lower speeds. Currently, towns and cities must wait for permission from the Maine Department of Transportation in order to address local safety issues or respond to local economic development or quality of life goals. Current statute also requires a municipality to take over speed limit setting on all streets in order to make a change on one street. This bill addresses these challenges by giving municipalities authority to set slower speeds without a speed study conducted by the MaineDOT and without assuming responsibility for setting or managing the speed limits on all roads in the municipality.

Speed limits may be lowered by up to 10 miles per hour and to no lower than a speed limit of 20 miles per hour. The bill also requires a municipality that is changing a speed limit to seek public input, review any safety deficiencies, and report to the Legislature for a period of 5 years data on before and after motor vehicle speeds, pedestrian counts, and bicycle counts.

### PROS:

- This bill gives municipalities an effective, low-cost tool for slowing vehicle speeds. A 2017 study of Boston by the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#) found that just reducing the citywide speed limit to 25 mph from 30 mph reduced speeding overall and dramatically decreased the instances of vehicles traveling faster than 35 mph.
- This bill modernizes Maine's outdated and problematic approach to speed-setting, which relies on the 85th percentile rule. The rule can result in speed studies leading to higher, not lower, posted speeds. Many states, including Minnesota and Oregon, have already moved away from the 85th percentile approach. The [National Association of City Transportation Officials is urging updates to the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways \(MUTCD\)](#) to end use of the rule.

### POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:

There is a common perception that lowering speed limits without changing design can lead to dangerous conditions. This belief is widely held by transportation engineers. However, a growing body of evidence disputes this, including a [new study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#).

There is also a misconception that making our streets slower and safer will result in negative economic impacts because of delay. This is simply not the case. Often, slowing streets to a safe speed in populated areas has only a limited and negligible increase in travel time for drivers.

### IMPACTS: Why does it matter?

**Equity:** Slower speeds are key to making streets feel safe and inviting for more people who walk, bike, and use mobility devices, which is critical for people who lack the option of driving.

**Transportation Safety and Choice:** Maine people love to walk and bike, but increasingly people feel unsafe on our roads. If we want to increase transportation choice, we must make our roads safer for everyone.

**Climate Action:** Slowing traffic in activity centers enables more people to walk, bike, and roll for day-to-day trips, which reduces vehicle miles traveled.

**Fiscal health:** This bill will lead to slower speeds in areas where people live and run businesses, increasing real estate values and retail activity, directly increasing local tax base.

**Economic Development:** This bill will allow municipalities to slow vehicle speeds in downtowns and village centers, where it is critical for people to feel safe and comfortable walking in order to conveniently and efficiently access shops and businesses. Data shows slower safer streets increase retail sales, economic activity, and investment.

**Quality of Life:** Safe streets are a critical factor for enabling Mainers to be physically active and socially connected in their communities.