



STATE OF MAINE
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF POLICY INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE
181 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0181

LD 1934 Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine

Testimony in Support

May 25, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Sarah Curran, and I am Deputy Director, Climate Planning and Community Partnerships in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. I am here today to testify in Support of LD 1934, Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine.

The Governor's Office of the Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) was created by Governor Janet Mills to collaborate across State agencies, stakeholders, and public to recommend innovative policy solutions for critical issues facing Maine. Our areas of focus include climate change, workforce development, housing, issues facing Maine's children, youth and aging residents, opioid response and recovery, and Maine's long-term economic prosperity. We staff, support and help lead several cross-department cabinets and projects, including the Children's Cabinet, the Maine Climate Council, and the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, among others.

GOPIF also administers the Community Resilience Partnership, a program recommended by Maine's four-year climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, which offers communities technical assistance, planning support and action grants for both climate mitigation and adaptation activities.

The Mills Administration believes there is a need for robust and coordinated technical assistance and support for Maine's communities.

Our cities, towns, and tribal governments are navigating complex challenges, from climate impacts to a lack of affordable housing to land use planning to accessing new federally funded infrastructure and energy opportunities. As described in the state's climate action plan *Maine Won't Wait*, the lack of local capacity, technical expertise, and funding are consistently cited by municipalities as reasons why they are not able to address their most pressing challenges in the way they might like. Maine's communities have a documented uneven access to planning resources across the state to support these and other local planning issues, as demonstrated in the attached map.

With the elimination of the former State Planning Office (SPO) in 2012, there is not currently a single state government agency or office responsible to administer financial and technical assistance programs to help build sustainable communities. Some SPO programs were eliminated or significantly reduced; others were moved to different state agencies.

The reduced support for municipalities, as well as the complications of small Maine communities navigating multiple state agencies to understand opportunities and support has been voiced as a problem – and this committee has heard multiple bills on this topic in this committee and others over the last

several years. The Administration recognizes that there is a need for the state to provide planning and technical assistance to towns and regional entities and for those resources to be coordinated and coherent across agencies and in their interactions with municipalities, consistent with the state's policy goals. Streamlined, coordinated support – or a “one-stop shop” has been voiced as a need by some municipal and regional government leaders.

Maine communities are contending with increasing growth and are likely to face unprecedented challenges in the years ahead.

Demographic and land-use trends, hastened by the pandemic, indicate many parts of Maine are experiencing growth. Continued record real estate sales and changes in the housing market are resulting in a lack of housing supply, exacerbating community workforce and economic opportunities. Additionally, climate change disruptions, from rising sea levels to disrupted water supplies and changing natural resources will require greater growth management strategies – creating greater urgency for improved long-term planning at the state and community level.

Currently, communities navigate programs across multiple state agencies in order to access technical assistance and funding.

The challenge of navigating programs across multiple agencies was highlighted by the Maine Municipal Association in testimony in 2021. They suggested: “Municipal officials spend tremendous amounts of often unpaid time trying to meet the obligations on the ground and would benefit from both a single point source for data but also cross-municipal collaboration between and inside departments at the state level.”

Better coordination of technical assistance and funding to communities in Maine would reduce the burden on communities seeking assistance, as well as support improved outcomes, especially for the smallest and most under resourced communities.

It will also help improve community access to significant federal funds that are currently available to support infrastructure and energy investments, including in transportation, broadband & technology, energy and building efficiency, and resilience and environmental protection. Many of these formula funds are flowing through state agencies, and state agencies can also help support competitive applications.

We believe that this bill is a welcome opportunity to continue discussions about how the state could provide more robust municipal support to Maine communities in need. We support LD 1934 Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine. This resolve will lead to a robust cross-agency planning effort and will require much-needed input and guidance from our local governments and leaders. We are hopeful the outcome could improve the state and municipal partnership this administration has worked hard to foster, and the planning required will generate an actionable outcome.

Thank you for your service and for the opportunity to testify today.

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Maine Climate Resilience

Local and Regional Planning Capacity

January 2022

