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Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

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

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity 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 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.

LD 1934 directs the Office of Policy Innovation and the Future to take on a review of opportunities and structural changes within state government and make recommendations to support Maine communities. It requires the review to consider municipal needs to navigate complex challenges including land use planning, climate resilience, natural resource protection, transportation, housing development, economic development, infrastructure, and more. Importantly, the review must consider mechanisms to help municipalities and regions compete for state and federal funding opportunities. Maine is well poised to access new federal funding and we must support communities and regions in seizing this opportunity.

Municipalities and regional planning organizations are focused on proactive solutions to a wide range of challenges, but they often have limited funding and capacity. In a survey conducted by TNC and Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI) in 2017, we gathered data from officials in 143 Maine municipalities. More than two-thirds said that inadequate funding was among the top five barriers to moving forward with clean energy and efficiency projects in their communities, while 61 percent ranked lack of staff capacity among their top five barriers.

While this bill addresses a broad range of challenges, I will focus on the areas where TNC works. As communities prepare for the effects of climate change, technical and financial assistance will be essential to coordinate and bolster resources for resilience. Existing programs like the Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program and the Community Resilience Partnership offer support but additional coordination and assistance could make it easier for local leaders to identify these opportunities.

In addition, state planning assistance can help with implementation of existing laws, requirements, and rules. Without a centralized touch point, municipalities must navigate sometimes complex, new requirements around land use, housing, and transportation with limited staff capacity.

Enhanced and coordinated planning assistance from state government would benefit and support all Maine communities. LD 1934 is an excellent first step in identifying opportunities, gaps, and recommendations for further action. The Nature Conservancy is happy to be a resource in these efforts as this review moves forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of LD 1934. I'm happy to answer questions now or at any time.