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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**Testimony of Representative Traci Gere Introducing LD 602,
An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and
Towns in the State
January 9, 2024**

Good morning Senator Pierce and fellow members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. I am Representative Traci Gere, and I represent House District 134. I am before you today to present LD 602, which proposes updates to the responsibilities of Maine's regional planning entities and support for their operations.

Meeting Maine's housing needs will require planning and coordination, and our Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) and Councils of Government (COGs) are best positioned to play this role. The RPOs/COGs already do a great deal of work with their member municipalities to create comprehensive plans, update ordinances, plan to address climate change, etc.

Before the current housing crisis emerged, planning for housing was on the back burner in Maine. Now, it's front and center, as communities across the state focus on preserving and producing housing to meet their changing needs. We need to clarify the mission and responsibilities of the RPOs/COGs so that they are best positioned to help regions set and achieve housing goals.

In addition to duties already in statute, LD 602 specifies RPO/COG responsibilities for:

1. Regional planning for housing
2. Mapping, including GIS, water/sewer infrastructure, and housing opportunity overlays
3. Facilitating cooperation between municipalities for setting and achieving regional housing goals.

We are also hearing today the report from GOPIF resulting from LD 1934 regarding the state's vision for improving coordination and delivery of planning grants and technical assistance to Maine communities. It is my intention that LD 602 align with that work, with the desired outcome being RPOs/COGs that are able to work effectively with state planning, environmental, and community and economic development resources in order to address Maine's housing crisis. This bill will also have a funding component sufficient to support the RPOs'/COGs' operations.

Respectfully,

Traci Gere
State Representative

District 134: Biddeford (part), Kennebunk (part) and Kennebunkport