



Testimony of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments in Support of LD602
An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State
January 9, 2024

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing: as the Executive Director of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG), I write this letter in support of LD 602.

Established in 1962, the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments is a regional planning agency serving Western Maine communities in Androscoggin, Franklin, and North Oxford Counties. AVCOG is a not for profit, 501(c)(3) agency established pursuant to MSRS Title 30 Section 2311 as a Council of Governments, exclusively owned and operated by member municipalities who join on a voluntary basis. AVCOG currently serves 51 municipalities and 3 counties. AVCOG is a leader in the coordination and delivery of regional planning and municipal services concentrated in four targeted areas: Economic Development; Land-Use Planning; Transportation Planning; and Environmental Management.

As a Regional Planning Commission and Council of Governments, AVCOG provides technical assistance to the municipalities we serve, most of which are small communities with no planning staff. We support the efforts to increase funding to regional organizations to deliver comprehensive, integrated, regional technical assistance for housing, land use, sustainability, and economic development. This includes the development and implementation of municipal ordinances and model ordinances; analysis of regional suitability for new housing developments; development and implementation of comprehensive plans; support to planning boards, select boards, and councils; and developing data and GIS mapping tools that provide communities with the resources needed to develop comprehensive plans.

Municipal governments are being asked to adapt their existing land use, zoning, and related local ordinances and regulations to implement new state policies. For many communities, development and revising of ordinances takes a significant amount of time and requires guidance and assistance from our planning staff. In addition, municipalities need access to state and federal funding but lack the capacity to successfully secure funding opportunities. As a regional council of governments, we have the statutory authority to support municipalities in these areas. To expand our capacity to provide the services as stated in this legislation, we must receive new state funding to support this work. We have limited to no unrestricted funding to provide the requested duties as outlined.

Many of our region's communities are rural and lack adequate and resilient infrastructure to face the many challenges they have, including old and subpar housing stock. I strongly urge you to consider passage of LD 602 to support the advancement of comprehensive approaches to the affordable housing needs in the state. We recognize the importance of the municipalities taking appropriate steps to do so, but it will require additional funding to adequately support them to conduct effective planning processes. Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Amy M. Landry
Executive Director