

131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on State and Local Government

Testimony of Scott Vlaun, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy, 1 March 2024
in favor of the Supplemental Budget LD2214

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; and Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Scott Vlaun. I am the executive director of the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy (CEBE) in Norway.

CEBE launched eleven years ago in response to the lack of local awareness about the impending climate emergency, and the lack of action to address it. Our tagline then, as now, was “Resilient Communities Restoring the Earth,” acknowledging the imperative to build community resilience while reducing emissions and fostering nature-based climate solutions.

Well, the climate emergency is now upon us. Our communities suffer catastrophic weather events on an increasingly frequent basis, damaging our already fragile local economies. Weather extremes also jeopardize our food system while shorter, wetter winters pose an existential threat to our billion-dollar winter recreation economy, and the migration of climate refugees into our state exacerbates our housing crisis.

After years of witnessing inaction at the state and federal level, we have been thrilled to see our state develop a nation-leading climate action plan, *and* allocate funding to back it up. Leveraging our local organizing experience, CEBE was among the first cohort of Service Providers for Maine’s Community Resilience Partnership. We have assisted nine towns to enroll in the program and write grants, and expect to soon help seven more, having just submitted our fourth Service Provider application.

These Community Action Grants have increased energy efficiency through weatherization of buildings and installation of solar projects and heat pumps. They have also funded assessments of vulnerable populations and infrastructure, local climate committees and watershed protection. Without this program, none of these under-resourced municipalities would likely have had the capacity to enroll and compete for this kind of funding, or access the technical assistance that we are now able provide.

While the CRP is a profound step in the right direction, with conversations and climate-related projects in our towns that we could only have imagined a decade ago, as currently funded, it is simply not enough. I am here today to urge the committees to consider an additional five million dollars for the CRP to provide more resources to our cash-strapped communities in the wake of recent devastating climate related disasters, and put more young people to work helping those communities navigate the complexities of accessing and managing these essential resources.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage the committees to support the establishment of the Maine Office of Community Affairs as outlined in L.D. 1934, “Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine.” This office, consolidating many initiatives under one umbrella will further assist our rural communities to compete with better resourced and staffed municipalities for important funding opportunities and technical assistance.

Thank you for your time,

Scott Vlaun, Executive Director, Center for an Ecology-Based Economy