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**TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS
TO THE APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY PROVIDED IN SUPPORT OF FULL FUNDING FOR:
"The Maine Office of Community Affairs"**

DATE OF BUDGET HEARING: 3/1/2024

Distinguished Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee:

The Maine Association of Planners wishes to offer testimony *in support of full funding for the Maine Office of Community Affairs.*

Communities across the State are dealing with major challenges, tighter budgets, and newly emerging and constantly developing issues such as climate resilience and housing. The State needs high-level coordination and a means to measure progress as we move forward on challenges such as these, and having one Office tasked with that effort will be essential to success.

It has been clearly documented that many Maine municipalities have insufficient staff to support land use planning and community planning, either at the local or regional level. Despite the very tangible and significant financial and legal impacts that many aspects of planning have for each and every municipality and region, communities continue to struggle to find the resources to both meet basic planning needs and to deal with increasingly complex planning issues and laws.

For years, MAP has heard from members and municipalities that there are serious problems regarding the communication and coordination across multiple State Departments for local and regional projects, and regarding the complexity of new rulemaking from a constant influx of new State Legislative mandates and programs. For example, recent laws and programs for housing and climate resilience have risen to the top as some of the more complicated issues, with fewer resources and support available at state or regional levels. Issues like these hit hardest on our small to mid-sized municipalities with little or no local capacity, funding, or expertise, as well as our Regional Planning organizations whose resources and capacity are already stretched thin. Currently, the State has multiple departments dealing with housing related resources, regulations, incentives and technical support for communities. At times, these may work at cross purposes or even conflict with one another. Resources and incentives have been expanding in recent years and could be better coordinated in a single office focused on the big picture goal of creating housing to meet the needs of Mainers.



Planning is inherently the practice of building bridges between disciplines through communication and coordination with all stakeholders. This practice results in greater efficiency of time and funding, and at its best offers new opportunities for prosperity and sustainability. From the local level to the state level, planners work every day to help communities navigate the details of complex issues while keeping an eye on a larger vision. You can't talk about housing without talking about utilities, transportation, density, or natural resource protection; you can't talk about economic development without talking about infrastructure, land use, or housing; you can't talk about climate resiliency without talking about smart growth, transportation, or hazard mitigation. That's complexity, that's comprehensive planning, and that's opportunity. Not only do local and regional planners need the technical and grant support at the state level to do this, but there are real opportunities at the state level to make connections across disciplines and departments, to consider how the state's Climate Plan, Statewide Recreation Plan, Economic Development Plan, and more, can be working in sync.

To create an Office of Community Affairs means an opportunity to provide meaningful support to all Maine communities for planning, and supporting the critical need to foster broad communication and collaboration across multiple State Departments and issues. For many communities, this can mean the difference between success and failure; for all communities across Maine, it can mean the difference between surviving and thriving. As the Maine Legislature works to create a system of state laws that protect and improve our communities, let those communities know that the Governor's Office and State Offices are there as partners in making that possible.

We encourage you to fully fund the proposed Maine Office of Community Affairs, as it will be crucial to the success of Maine communities going forward.

Sincerely,

Amanda Bunker, MAP President

and The Maine Association of Planners Legislative Policy Committee

