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***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government***

RE: LD 2214 – An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government: Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Jeremy Bell and I am the Climate Adaptation Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of two proposed supplemental budget areas relating to the Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future.**

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. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

TNC has worked in close collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (GOPIF). Our State Director, Kate Dempsey, serves on the Maine Climate Council and many of our staff serve on the related Working Groups and sub-groups. Our organization works with both coastal and inland communities to support climate resilience planning and investments. We are pleased to see this work in action in the GOPIF budget proposal.

The GOPIF budget proposes growing the Community Resilience Partnership Program. An additional five million dollars will help another 100 cities, towns, and tribal governments create plans to address vulnerabilities to extreme weather. TNC fully supports additional funding for climate planning, adaptation, and resilience projects through this program. This is especially important work given the recent storms and widespread flooding across the state. Increased funding to the Community Resilience Partnership Program would enable more communities to plan more resilience in their communities to reduce flood impacts.

The Nature Conservancy is directly involved in the Community Resilience Partnership. We provide free services to Maine’s most marginalized communities to help them access Community Resilience Partnership funds on projects chosen and led by the

communities themselves. Examples of our supporting work include an ongoing project to plant street trees to reduce heat impacts in an urban central Maine community, as well as a tribal led clean energy project in Aroostook County. With the recent flooding, we anticipate additional support needs to reduce flood risk and increase public safety through the Community Resilience Partnership.

Additionally, TNC supports the establishment of a Maine Office of Community Affairs. Last session, we testified in support¹ of LD 1934, Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine, which passed the Legislature and was signed into law by the Governor in June of last year. LD 1934 directed GOPIF to review opportunities and structural changes in the organization of state government and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

As a result of that legislation and the required research and report, GOPIF proposes to establish a Maine Office of Community Affairs to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance, and financial support to create stronger more resilient communities. The Nature Conservancy appreciates the leadership of this Legislature in passing the enabling legislation and of GOPIF for pioneering new and exciting ways to better serve all Mainers.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of these two important budget areas.

¹ <https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=179213>