



Testimony of Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments in Support of full funding for the establishment of the Office of Community Affairs

a part of LD 2214 An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee; I, Amy Landry, Executive Director of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, urge the full funding for the establishment of the Office of Community Affairs, contained in the Governor's supplemental budget.

Established in 1962, AVCOG is a Regional Planning Agency serving Western Maine communities in Androscoggin, Franklin, and North Oxford Counties. We are a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) agency established under MSRS Title 30 Section 2311 as a Council of Governments, exclusively owned, and operated by member municipalities who join voluntarily. AVCOG currently serves 51 municipalities, 3 counties, and 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 outlined in LD 1934, a Resolve to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities, to establish an office that will assist in supporting communities to navigate and access planning technical assistance and funding opportunities, with particular attention to needs of under-resourced communities.

Without a central coordinated office at the state level to deliver planning services, it makes it difficult to navigate through various grant funding opportunities and programs to deliver comprehensive, integrated, regional technical assistance for housing, land use, sustainability, and economic development. The complexity of the many related housing, environmental, and climate-related challenges that our communities face requires an increased level of coordination across these agencies to be most effective and efficient.

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, the 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 cannot successfully secure those funding opportunities. As a Regional Council Of Governments, we have the statutory authority to support municipalities in these areas. We believe the proposed reorganization will provide much-needed coordination and efficiencies that will benefit communities as they navigate increasingly complex challenges.

The assistance that we provide to support communities 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 data and GIS mapping tools that provide communities with the resources needed to develop comprehensive plans.



With the ever-increasing amount of federal funding available, communities in Maine have the potential access to the funds necessary for the implementation of priority projects. Our role as a regional organization is to support communities with the capacity needed to develop and propose projects. Streamlining state grant processes that can be used to leverage federal funds will greatly enhance our efforts. Communities have difficulty navigating through state agencies and grant programs and rely on us to assist them in finding the appropriate resources. In turn, we as a regional organization, have our difficulties wading through various state agencies, some of which provide conflicting or duplicative information because there is a lack of coordination among the various state departments. This leads to inefficiencies, wasted time, and redundancy by our staff to consistently manage and comply with the various requirements of uncoordinated efforts.

I strongly urge you to consider passage to support the advancement of comprehensive approaches to address the myriad of planning issues facing our communities. We recognize the importance of the municipalities taking appropriate steps to develop sound policies and plans, but it will require the coordination of the state and regions to adequately support them. Thank you for your consideration.



Testimony of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments in Support of full funding for
the Community Resilience Partnership program

a part of *LD 2214 An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*

March 1, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee: I, Amy Landry, Executive Director of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, urge the full funding for expanding the Community Resilience Partnership program, contained in the Governor's supplemental budget.

In 2022, AVCOG joined the Community Resilience Partnership (CRP) and is a three-time recipient of the Service Provider Grant Program and serves as the Regional Coordinator for Western Maine including AVCOG's three counties, as well as Somerset and Kennebec. AVCOG received its first Service Provider Grant in 2022 to assist the towns of Carthage, Chesterville, Greenwood, and Jay to enroll in the Partnership including conducting a town self-evaluation, holding community engagement meetings, and passing a resolution. In addition, we assisted three of these towns in applying for their first Community Action Grant (CAG). The towns of Carthage (\$36,940), Greenwood (\$28,649), and Jay (\$50,000) applied for and received funding for a variety of climate action projects totaling \$115,589.

In 2023 AVCOG received its second Service Provider Grant to assist the towns of Rangeley, Eustis, Kingfield, Phillips, and Wilton with the enrollment process. AVCOG also assisted them in applying for CAGs in March of 2023, with 4 of the 5 towns submitting grants and receiving funding for projects. The town of Rangeley received \$50,000 to implement a large heat pump system in their town garage. Eustis received \$49,949 to implement a heat pump system, upgrade to LED lighting, and purchase energy-efficient appliances for the food pantry. Phillips received \$30,742 for upgrades to the town office including heat pumps and LED lighting. Wilton received \$18,445 to implement a heat pump system in the town office. AVCOG also received a third Service Provider Grant and is currently working to enroll the towns of Avon, Buckfield, Minot, Strong, and Wales. These towns will also receive assistance to write their CAG in March.

As a Regional Coordinator, we have focused on supporting towns and their service providers to fund and implement priority climate and energy projects that reduce emissions and address climate impacts. In the five-county region covered, there are 41 communities engaged in the partnership, with 40 communities enrolled and eligible for CAGs. Of those enrolled 26, or 65%, applied for and were awarded CAGs. Examples of those grants include solar installation on a municipal building; creating a resilience committee; heat pumps for municipal buildings in seven towns; roof insulation; EV charging; updating a watershed protection guide; creating greenspace; and building window inserts.

We provide additional technical assistance on an as-needed basis to communities in Region 3. Additionally, we have developed a newsletter that is sent to all communities to provide information about educational opportunities and grants that our staff can help them apply for. The Regional Coordinator plays a crucial role in supporting communities who seek to build a more resilient community, beyond working directly with a service provider.



All of these efforts are helping to build environmental, societal, and energy resilience in communities throughout the region who otherwise would not have the resources and/or expertise to do so. Resiliency initiatives can be large undertakings for communities, and many cannot successfully complete them without adequate support or funding.

The funding contained in the Governor's supplemental budget will enable AVCOG and the communities we serve to continue the work that has been started, implementing tangible actions that have an immediate positive impact on individual communities, the region, and the state. With the funding proposed to expand the program, we are confident that our municipalities will have the support they need to implement actions and policies that make meaningful progress toward climate resiliency. With increased opportunities for federal climate and energy funding, these dollars are critical to help communities leverage those dollars to address climate impacts. The Partnership will allow communities to be prepared for these programs which gives them a tremendous opportunity to invest in their infrastructure and resiliency.

We encourage you to support full funding for the Community Resilience Partnership Program as proposed in the supplemental budget. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.