



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Tiffany Roberts presenting*

### **LD 629, An Act to Restore Matching Funding to the Maine Development Foundation**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Good morning Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Tiffany Roberts, and I have the honor of representing House District 149, which includes the communities of North Berwick and South Berwick. I come before you today to present **LD 629, An Act to Restore Matching Funding to the Maine Development Foundation**.

The purpose of this legislation is to amplify the impact of a vital public-private partnership – the Maine Development Foundation (MDF). MDF plays a pivotal role in addressing Maine's workforce challenges and contributes significantly to economic and community development.

MDF's efforts with initiatives like the Forest Opportunity Roadmap and the SEAMaine address innovative pathways to prosperity. Importantly, MDF's statewide reach is invaluable to smaller service centers and rural regions, providing access to expertise and programming.

LD 629 appropriates General Fund support of \$500,000 per year to MDF to expand and sustain the impact of its programming and fulfill the pledge that the legislature made in 1977 and kept until 1991. I believe that we have bipartisan agreement on the value that MDF provides and see the potentially significant impact that would be available with this funding. Although one legislature cannot bind another, let us stay true to the original commitment.

Defining this funding as general program support enables it to go where it is most needed to match other funding, bridge other funding and ensure that efforts can be persistent and powerful in reaching more communities and meeting the needs of economic and workforce development for economic growth.

Currently, MDF receives a small amount of General Fund support each year of just over \$58,000, which is earmarked for specific initiatives. They also are a contractor to DECD for the Growth

Council for about \$90,000 per year. This is out of their budget of over \$3 million, where less than 5% comes from the state.

I'm asking the committee to keep the legislature's pledge from 1977. Back then, it was a 50-50 partnership with \$250,000 in annual state matching funds. (The proposed \$500,000 only partially accounts for decades of inflation – full inflation would bring it to \$1.3 million per year!) And let's help ensure critical work doesn't wither on the vine when short-term outside grants come and go. MDF has been able to win many competitive federal grants, but their important work in Maine must persist even when there is uncertainty about the funding outlook in DC.

The needs, opportunities and potential impact of MDF as a public-private partnership are greater than ever. MDF has been doing phenomenal work on our behalf for 45 years. They have leveraged their independence, private sector relationships and entrepreneurial grant-writing for this important public mission, even absent our original pledge. Imagine what could be done if that was restored.

This legislation will sustain and enhance MDF's critical impact on our workforce, economy and communities.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.