



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony in Support to LD 629

"An Act to Restore matching Funding to the Maine Development Foundation"

March 6, 2025

Patrick Strauch, Executive Director

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. I'm Patrick Strauch of Exeter, Maine. I'm here testifying today as the Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council. The Maine Forest Products Council is an organization representing more than 300 members from all facets of the forest products industry from the stump to the mill. Our members include paper mills, sawmills, secondary wood processors and large landowners. Our membership also includes banks and insurance companies. We represent anyone with an interest in promoting a robust and healthy forest products industry.

I am here today to testify in support of LD 629, "An Act to Restore matching Funding to the Maine Development Foundation" by the sponsor, Representative Roberts.

For the last eight years, the Maine Forest Products Council has worked collaboratively with the Maine Development Foundation on a unique cross-sector collaboration called the Forest Opportunity Roadmap, also known as FOR/Maine. This project brings together industry, communities, government, institutions of higher education and non-profits to help Maine strategically adapt and capitalize on changing markets to maintain our leading role in the global forest economy. Since its inception eight years ago, the Council has helped lead this effort, which is staffed by the Maine Development Foundation. This ongoing effort has been tremendously successful, and that is in part thanks to the good, credible, non-partisan work of the Maine Development Foundation. The Maine Development Foundation has been a great organization to partner with.

MDF is uniquely valuable, the support they've provided to not only the whole effort but the deep working relationship we've been able to forge with our work force committee chaired by Ryan Bushy with Louisiana Pacific as it works on DOL credentialing issues and educational curriculum in Maine's K-12 school systems. There are also important efforts to work with distressed mill towns to craft efforts to enable their comeback. I also believe MDF involvement in the FOR/Maine project has strengthened their knowledge of natural resource issues that are a critical part of Maine's heritage and future opportunity.

These efforts have been important to the forest industry, and they need to be persistent and sustainable. I've seen firsthand how during the startup phases and the transitions between competitive grants (valleys of death), MDF seeks with the partners to lean in as best they to support these communities. More core support is justified.

LD 262, provides ongoing funds to restore matching funds for private contributions to support MDF's economic, workforce and community development initiatives. These funds, which would help MDF leverage up to \$500,000 per year, would allow the organization to continue its great work, which are of a great benefit to our economy and state.

For these reasons, please vote **'Ought to pass'** on LD 629. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.