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Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

RE: LD 596—Resolve, to Provide Legislative Approval of Northern Maine Transmission Infrastructure

Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Karen Blakelock and I work as the climate and energy policy advisor for the Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 596, an important legislation that will authorize a future northern Maine transmission project.**

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 both nature and people can thrive. We work in more than 70 countries, and use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we know that well-sited renewable energy and transmission infrastructure is necessary to meet our state's climate goals. For this reason, last session we worked closely with Sen. Chip Curry to convene stakeholders to discuss a better process for community engagement in pursuing transmission lines. That stakeholder process resulted in a significant amendment to LD 2087, which made important changes to ensure community engagement in the process and was voted out of this committee unanimously.¹

While this bill awaits a forthcoming request for proposal and associated docket number from the Public Utilities Commission, TNC would like to continue playing a role assisting in stakeholder discussions in this policy area. Any process that results from discussion on this bill must consider the three C's—climate, conservation, and community. We need to rapidly build out transmission to support the development of renewable generation, while ensuring that these projects are sited in the right locations to minimize costs to ratepayers and impacts to communities without harming our natural environment.

TNC is committed to supporting a careful and coordinated approach to transmission planning in Maine. We have been engaged in the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program through the legislature and the PUC process and have consistently emphasized the importance of comparing the environmental, land-use and community impacts of proposed transmission and generation projects. We encouraged the Maine PUC to give strong preference to transmission

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0880&item=2&snum=131>

projects co-located with existing linear infrastructure, while considering the potential impacts of these projects on overburdened and underserved communities.

LD 596, and the create an opportunity for Maine to start fresh and develop a new approach to transmission siting that balances communities, climate, and conservation. The Nature Conservancy in Maine would welcome the opportunity to engage in that process and share our science-based mapping and siting expertise with the committee or any potential stakeholder group that arises in the context of this bill or related transmission discussion. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.