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Committee on Housing and Economic Development  
Maine State Legislature

Dear Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Jeremy Ashlock, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Augusta Downtown Alliance. I am writing to urge your support for LD 629, which seeks to restore matching state funding for the Maine Development Foundation (MDF), including its Maine Downtown Center (MDC) program.

MDF has been a cornerstone of economic and community development in our state for over 40 years. Through its programs, including leadership development initiatives and the Maine Downtown Center, MDF provides critical support that strengthens Maine's downtowns and business communities. As the state coordinator for the Main Street America program, MDC has been instrumental in guiding Augusta and ten other Main Street communities toward sustainable revitalization, leveraging local assets to create economic growth and community vibrancy.

The public square is an idea that has served humans for millennia. The idea that there is somewhere to go for those who wish to congregate and communicate with one another. Now more than ever, our citizens crave community - they crave connection, and they need a public space. Our downtowns in each of our vital Maine communities lead in this position to be community hubs and serve as the public square. In the age of isolated internet communication and interest-based networks, it is imperative to our municipal democracies that Maine preserves the idea that folks form communities with those who are in close proximity to one another, and that they work together to improve their place. It's a simple but often overlooked fact - we just don't know our neighbors like we used to.

MDF also serves in a linchpin position for Maine's economy - tying together Maine's macro-economic interests, developing workforce plans and miscellaneous industry growth initiatives, with Maine's micro-economic actions in its communities, where the folks who will go on to engage with and support these Maine industries work, live, and do business. It is this last-mile delivery advantage that I believe sets MDF apart from other economic development organizations. MDF truly knows that change and progress for the whole of the state of Maine begins and ends in each of its communities. This bottom-up approach is not something I have seen successfully deployed elsewhere in our state.



The Maine Downtown Center's impact is undeniable. As a statewide resource for downtown revitalization, MDC provides expertise and individualized support that no other entity in Maine offers. This tailored approach yields exceptional results. The return on investment is remarkable: for every \$1 invested in a Main Street community, there is a \$23 return. This multiplier effect demonstrates the tangible benefits of a well-supported downtown network.

LD 629 seeks to restore the \$500,000 in annual funding—an amount adjusted for inflation from the original 1978 legislative intent. Reinstating this funding would reaffirm the state's commitment to fostering economic resilience and community development through MDF's critical programs.

I have personally witnessed the value of MDF's work through Augusta Downtown Alliance's partnership with MDC. Their support has been instrumental in securing grants and driving meaningful change in our community. Their accreditation visits and ongoing assistance ensure that our downtown remains vibrant and continues to evolve to meet the needs of residents and businesses alike. They connect our efforts with learned experiences from across the country - allowing us to expedite the evolution of our communities.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support LD 629 and reinstate funding for MDF. By doing so, you will ensure that this vital organization can continue to serve communities across Maine, driving economic growth and preserving the unique character of our downtowns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Ashlock  
Executive Director, Augusta Downtown Alliance