

March 3, 2025

Dear Senator Chip Curry, Representative Traci Gere, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Scott Berk, and I am a business and property owner in downtown Norway. I serve as Chair of Norway Downtown, our community's Main Street Affiliate program, and have been on its board of directors since 2009. Norway has been an active participant in Maine's Main Street program since 2003, and our success is a direct result of the Maine Downtown Center's (MDC) (a program of the Maine Development Foundation) support, training, and coaching.

I am writing to urge you to support LD 629 because investing in the Maine Development Foundation (MDF) is a proven strategy for strengthening our state's economy and communities. MDF's impact is far-reaching—from training Maine's next generation of leaders to revitalizing downtowns across the state, all on an incredibly tight budget. The numbers speak for themselves: in the Main Street program alone, every \$1 invested generates a \$23 return. This is the kind of smart, high-impact investment Maine needs.

When the Legislature originally established MDF over 40 years ago, it was fully funded. Over time, that funding disappeared, leaving MDF to do more with less. Now is the time to restore this critical support. A \$500,000 investment in MDF will have a transformative impact statewide, positioning Maine as a leader in revitalizing rural and working-class communities.

Norway is a success story that demonstrates what's possible when we invest in our downtowns. With guidance from the Maine Downtown Center, we have turned a struggling Main Street—once plagued by vacancies and transient businesses—into the thriving downtown we see today. Thanks to historic preservation grants administered by MDC, we have stabilized and taken key steps toward the full rehabilitation of Norway's beloved Opera House, a cornerstone of our community's identity and economy.

LD 629 is a high-return, common-sense investment in Maine's future. I urge you to support and pass this bill to ensure that MDF can continue its essential work in strengthening communities across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Sincerely,



Scott Berk
Chair, Norway Downtown Board of Directors
Downtown Norway Property Owner