



**Hancock County
Planning Commission**

a voluntary association of governments.

66 Main St., Ste. 303
PO Box 1703
Ellsworth, ME 04605
(207) 667-7131
hpcp@hpcpme.org

May 8, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

On behalf of the Hancock County Planning Commission (HCPC), I am testifying in support of LD 1751.

HCPC serves the 37 municipalities of Hancock County and has assisted with nearly every comprehensive plan in our region going back decades. In my relatively short career, I've worked on about 18 comprehensive plans for communities ranging in size from 250 to 3,500 residents, with budgets between \$10,000 and \$35,000. That experience has given me a clear grasp of what it takes to develop comprehensive plans that balance local goals with State requirements.

HCPC has worked closely with the Maine Association of Planners to develop LD 1751 in response to the challenges faced by the rural communities we serve. This bill takes practical steps in the right direction, with a particular focus on improving the accuracy and accessibility of State-provided datasets.

The inventory and analysis phase of comprehensive planning, which heavily relies on State data, is often time-consuming, especially for our smallest municipalities. A key issue is the State-provided data pack, which can be difficult to navigate, challenging to interpret, and sometimes inaccurate or outdated.

Without reliable data, planning efforts are at risk of being shaped by anecdotes and the loudest voices, rather than by objective evidence. LD 1751 addresses this by streamlining the inventory process, introducing a flexible tiered system, and requiring the State to provide more usable data. This will allow local committees to spend less time wrestling with data and more time developing meaningful goals and strategies.

Maine's communities are diverse, ranging from large urban centers to towns with fewer than 200 residents. Yet current comprehensive planning requirements apply a one-size-fits-all model, placing an equal burden on municipalities regardless of size or capacity. The challenges faced by small towns—such as Winter Harbor—are fundamentally different from those of service center communities like Ellsworth or urban areas such as Portland.

Many rural towns rely on small volunteer committees and often lack professional planning staff, making it difficult to meet the same requirements expected of larger, better-resourced municipalities. This capacity gap often leads to volunteer burnout, delays, or plans that struggle to meet State standards despite local effort and commitment.

The tiered approach proposed in LD 1751 offers a more realistic and equitable path forward. By aligning planning expectations with a community's size and capacity, it ensures that comprehensive planning remains accessible, manageable, and relevant for municipalities of all types—without sacrificing quality or local relevance.

LD 1751 represents a crucial step toward more effective and equitable planning for all Maine communities. By recognizing the diverse needs and capacities of municipalities, this bill ensures that every community, no matter its size, can develop a comprehensive plan that reflects its unique challenges and opportunities, ultimately supporting sustainable growth and resilience across the state.

Sincerely,

Averi Varney, Executive Director