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Joint Standing Committee on Housing

RE: LD 602, An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to submit comments in support of LD 602, An Act to Provide Regional Support to Deliver State and Federal Programs to Cities and Towns in the State.** TNC supports the draft amendment to LD 602 presented by the sponsor, Representative Gere, on January 9th, 2024.

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 nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. TNC has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

Municipalities and regional planning organizations are focused on proactive solutions to a wide range of challenges, but they often have limited funding and capacity. In a survey conducted by TNC and Coastal Enterprises Inc. (CEI) in 2017, we gathered data from officials in 143 Maine municipalities. More than two-thirds said that inadequate funding was among their top five barriers, while 61 percent ranked lack of staff capacity among their top five barriers. The work the Maine Legislature and Mills Administration have been doing to improve coordination and planning has been critical and this bill would build on those efforts. Any added capacity will help Maine communities make smart planning decisions that facilitate economic growth while protecting natural resources and ensuring resilience to climate change.

This bill focuses on three important functions – assisting municipalities with accessing state and federal funds, advising on the development of key ordinances, and establishing mapping and GIS support tools. Funding, guidance, and data – pragmatic support to ensure Maine towns of all sizes can succeed.

We urge this committee to support LD 602. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.