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Testimony of GrowSmart Maine in support of
LD 446, An Act to Reestablish the State Planning Office

March 3, 2021

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and members of the Legislative Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Nancy Smith and I am the Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan organization working to create lasting prosperity without sacrificing the quality of life that defines Maine.

We support policies, programs and projects that define and protect the value of our unique built and natural places while supporting long term economic opportunity. This bill, as described by the bill's sponsor, solidly aligns with that intention.

Though the bill title seems to indicate otherwise, this proposal is focused on **restoring planning resources at state and regional levels**. We are encouraged by a recent conversation with Representative Bailey, in which he outlined his vision to reinvent a one-stop shop for municipalities, regional planning commissions, and economic development districts to access planning and development tools and strategies, as well as to help municipalities navigate occasional misalignment of regulations between state agencies and facilitate regional planning collaboration. **A statewide coordinated resource for municipalities, regional planning entities, and the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) is essential** as towns, cities, and the LUPC wrestle with increasingly complex issues at the intersection of economy, community, and environment; **planning to meet increased demands for housing and sustainable communities; respond to changing markets for both fisheries, forestry and agriculture; and prepare for sea level rise and other changes associated with a changing climate.**

This is exceedingly evident in the Climate Action Plan, [Maine Won't Wait](#), as it delegates much of the responsibility for key action items to municipalities.

GrowSmart heartily supports this strategy of enabling local action coordinated through regional approaches. Municipalities demonstrated their skills in addressing crises as they immediately responded to the needs of their residents and businesses when the pandemic hit Maine. That said, municipalities cannot go it alone. ***At the heart of this proposal is recognition of the urgency in ensuring municipalities and the LUPC have resources and support necessary to address community challenges, remain true to their comprehensive plans, and coordinate action across regions.***

We know that this is not a prime time to recommend creation of a new agency, and yet with the urgency surrounding the Climate Action Plan and the timeliness of the report from the [Economic Recovery committee](#), there has ***also never been a better time for this purposeful realignment and addition of planning and development tools at the state and regional levels.***

In considering this bill, we encourage the committee to refer to numerous related bills calling for studies and stakeholder convenings as it would make sense to consider incorporating this bill into those conversations, with the charge to come back to this committee in the Second Regular Session of the 130th with specific recommendations. These include LD 609, LR 934 and LR 1616.

In closing, I'd like to quote Community Planner Amanda Bunker in our recent meeting with the bill sponsor, who succinctly captured the value of this proposal when she noted "A planner is someone who thinks comprehensively about how all the pieces fit together." Maine needs this sort of vision and coordination now more than ever.

GrowSmart Maine encourages the committee to give this bill serious consideration and we are available to support your work as may be helpful to you.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy E. Smith". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large, stylized 'S' at the end.

Nancy E Smith
Executive Director