



**Testimony before the**

**Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government**

**By Rob Wood, Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy**

**March 3, 2021**

**Re: LD 446, An Act To Reestablish the State Planning Office**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Rob Wood and I am the Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **neither for nor against LD 446**, An Act to Reestablish the State Planning Office.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is an international 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. Working in more than 70 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been working in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 275,000 acres. We work across the state to restore the rivers and streams that support healthy fish populations, partner with fishermen to rebuild groundfish populations to benefit coastal communities across the Gulf of Maine, and develop innovative solutions to address the causes and impacts of climate change.

We would like to first thank Representative Bailey for bringing forward this important bill. It recognizes the significant need for enhanced state assistance for regional and municipal planning across much of Maine, in large part spurred by the dissolution of the former State Planning Office (SPO). While several functions of the former SPO are now housed in other state agencies and programs, technical assistance to municipalities and regional planning organizations is no longer offered at the same scale or with the same coordinated approach that is so important for local governments that are often lacking in capacity and resources.

Enhanced and coordinated local planning assistance from state government can benefit Maine's lands, waters, climate and communities in myriad ways. Land use patterns are largely determined at the local level, where careful planning can help balance development with natural resource protection in a manner that improves residents' quality of life and preserves Maine's quality of

place. Well-planned land use patterns can reduce the need for driving, which can cut down on greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution while saving residents time and money. And, importantly, as communities prepare for the effects of climate change, technical and financial assistance will be essential to ensuring municipalities across the state have the resources they need to bolster their resilience.

State planning assistance can also help smooth implementation of existing environmental laws. Without a centralized touch point, municipalities must navigate sometimes complex requirements with limited capacity. Stronger coordination of municipal assistance can help ease local compliance and increase support for strong protections for Maine's environment.

We support the intent behind LD 446 and believe that it opens an important conversation on ways to improve state support for regional and municipal planning. We are hopeful that this legislation will lead to additional efforts to enhance state planning assistance, and we are happy to be a resource in those efforts as this process moves forward. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.