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Report to the Legislature on Public Hearings to Identify the Needs of Maine's Cultural Community

Cultural Affairs Council

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MAINE CULTURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 1877

March 4, 2004

The Maine Cultural Affairs Council supports passage of LD 1877, particularly the component of the bond which provides funds to the Cultural Affairs to invest in cultural infrastructure in designated Pine Tree Zone communities through the New Century Community Program.

Growing Maine is not an easy task. Maine has been experiencing a steady decline in its manufacturing base, and more and more economic growth in Maine occurs in a narrow geography. A key point of the Pine Tree Zone program is to incent growth outside this area, particularly in rural areas of the State.

Thus far, much of the discussion of Pine Tree Zone has centered around state and local taxes and infrastructure costs. The decision of the Governor to include the Cultural Affairs Council in the mix recognizes that business location decisions extend beyond finances, and include quality of life issues. The simple fact is that people want to be in Maine because of its environment, because of its pace of life, because of its people, and because of its heritage.

But in moving from large cities like Boston, New York, or Washington, D.C., many business people and their spouses also consider the cultural offerings of a community before deciding to relocate. Even the Department of Defense considers cultural assets in determining whether to locate a facility in a particular place. We want people to invest in Pine Tree Zones, and we want to make sure that the people who make the investments understand that, in coming to Maine, they are coming to a State rich in culture, rich in community offerings, and rich in heritage. That is why the Governor wisely included the Cultural Affairs Council as part of this bond package.

We understand that there are eight Pine Tree Zones in Maine, throughout the State, and they include places like Washington and Aroostook County, Oxford County, and Piscataquis County, to name a few. The New Century Community Program has a proven track record of investing in these communities. This Committee has seen the map of New Century investments as part of our testimony for LD 1787. Each of the seven member agencies of the CAC regularly inventories the need for future investments in libraries, historical buildings, museums, performance halls, and other cultural infrastructure needs, and we can tell you that the need for investment within Pine Tree Zone communities is great. The \$1 million proposed in this bond really only scratches the surface of the need, but represents an important step in the right direction.

As this Committee knows, the New Century Community Program has been nationally recognized for its efficiency and the collaborative way in which funds have been allocated to projects around Maine. This bond package calls upon the Program to continue its efforts, but to provide some focus to capital infrastructure needs within Pine Tree Zones. Our goal is to utilize these funds to maximize the cultural and heritage infrastructure of Pine Tree Zones and to help with the revitalization of downtowns within Pine Tree Zone communities. Our goal is to send a strong signal to businesses that moving to Maine means moving to strong communities with a vibrant cultural life.

This formula has worked elsewhere in Maine. When arts centers, libraries, or historic structures are renovated, people come back to the host communities. The Theater at Monmouth, and Deertrees in Harrison, are now staples of their communities and attract people to live and visit. The Farnsworth Museum is a critical component of the growth in Rockland. What we are talking about is investing in core institutions like this, across rural Maine, so that people come back, so that restaurants will decide to locate their, so that small business can thrive. What we are talking about is the backbone of life in Maine, and communities that are rich in culture and activities for children and adults.

Last year, MaineBiz list arts and museum jobs as the 6th fastest growing sector in the Maine economy. Investing in arts and heritage not only spurs job growth directly, but the new infrastructure itself serves as vital community anchors to encourage additional growth. This is a good deal for Maine.

Final point -- every dollar invested in the New Century Community Program has yielded a match of nearly three dollars. Some projects are as high as 27:1. This overall 3:1 match is obviously a good deal for taxpayers, and one more reason to support the inclusion of the New Century piece in this bond package.

We thank you for your time, and we urge you to support this important bond package. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have further questions.

cc: Governor Baldacci and Staff
Members of Legislative Leadership
Jane Lincoln, Chief of Staff
Jack Cashman, DECD
Members of the Cultural Affairs Council