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Testimony of Nancy Smith, Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine

in support of Heather Johnson's nomination for Commissioner of DECD

January 29, 2019

Senator Herbig, Representative Daughtry and members of the Joint Standing IDEA Committee, my name is Nancy Smith and I am the Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan, non-profit 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. I am here to support Heather Johnson's nomination based on my work with her through the Maine Broadband Coalition.

In our interactions, Heather has been collaborative, open and fully engaged. With her background in the private sector and in regional economic development efforts, she brought to ConnectME an appreciation for the value of community-driven initiatives and regional approaches. These threads will inform her work in the broader context of overseeing DECD.

In the press release announcing her nomination, Heather said of her new role, "I am excited not only by the opportunity to work with economic development agencies, business and communities across the state, but by the great potential we have to find sustainable growth strategies for all parts of Maine." This regional approach suits Maine best, given our broad geography and varied assets.

She also said, "I think connectivity is absolutely one of the ways to do that. Allow people to work other places and work remotely – most large companies are moving to remote workforces so if we create connectivity options, people will be able to live wherever they want and work there as well," This strategy highlights the value of Maine's quality of life; our environment and communities, working farms, open space and cool downtowns and village center, as a foundation for sustainable economic growth

We applaud her intentions and are ready to support her in this work, including her first task of taking a complete inventory of all economic development organizations and agencies in Maine. Motivated by the amount of work to be done and the scarcity of resources, we all strive to coordinate and target our efforts while avoiding duplication.

GrowSmart Maine encourages the IDEA committee to support this nomination.