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Testimony of GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 2, An Act to
Require the Inclusion of Racial Impact Statements in the
Legislative Process

February 2, 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 for all Mainers. It is with this in mind that we support LD 2, which lays out the process for framing and then deploying a pilot program to incorporate racial equity statements in evaluation of legislative proposals.

GrowSmart Maine supports the intention of this bill to provide legislators and others with an evaluation of potential impacts toward historically disadvantaged populations as they consider legislative proposals. In our own evaluation of racial equity implications of land use and smart growth policies, we acknowledge a history of both blatant and subtle racial inequity in such actions as placement of highways through neighborhoods that were home to minority communities and zoning rules that exclude multi-family housing in some residential areas, thereby narrowing opportunities to live in that neighborhood. As we come to terms with the ramifications of past land use policies, we support this proposal to reframe policy evaluations to deliberately address racial implications.

We also support the process outlined in LD 2, with time allowed to frame up and then deploy a pilot project during the 130th Legislative with a recommendation to the 131st Legislature no later than December 15, 2022.

There are things we can do now to chart a new course toward equitable community and economic development throughout Maine. This proposal is one significant step in that direction.

In closing, I will quote Dr. Andre Perry, a Fellow at the Brookings Institute during a recent session of the Racial Equity Summit hosted by Smart Growth America. In discussing this issue, Andre noted, "Equity is stimulus. Build equity."