



## **Testimony to the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs & Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business**

**L.D. 221 - In Support of Maine Development Foundation Funding**

**February 22, 2021**

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement & Business,

My name is Brandon McDonald, Co-Chair of the Steering Committee for Momentum Aroostook, a youth leadership & retention program under the Realize Maine Network funded by the Maine Development Foundation. We are a group looking to create Maine's next generation of leadership and learn and grow from our mentors along the way. I would like to extend my appreciation for allowing us to testify in support of MDF's appropriation.

Momentum Aroostook is a regional networking group that offers leadership enrichment and population retention opportunities to young Mainers from Houlton to Fort Kent. Our reach spans over 1,200 followers through 2 Facebook pages, along with additional reach through Instagram and local media partners such as WAGM-TV and Bangor Daily News. We see constant interaction between community and members to accomplish our mission. Our steering committee consists of 10 members who are a broad demographic of young entrepreneurs, non-profit, and for-profit leaders. Outside of their professions, our members have been proud to serve our community as Rotarians, through the United Way, and even worked with the Maine Economic Recovery Committee. We attribute this bond with our community to the strong foundation that Momentum Aroostook helps foster.

Through key actions with leaders in Aroostook County, we bridge the gap between young professionals and necessary leadership roles in Northern Maine. We have gathered support from long-standing organizations like MMG Insurance, Katahdin Trust Company, Northern Maine Development Commission, and most importantly, the Aroostook Partnership – a collaborative group of businesses in the region. Through a partnership with AP, we aim to bring more appointed potential youth leaders on-board with Momentum Aroostook to create targeted leadership opportunities and build our core membership group. We are proud to build leadership skills and confidence for young professionals during this significant demographic shift in Maine's aging workforce. Our organization is also a key partner of the Young Professionals Institute, a University of Maine leadership development program.



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Beyond our typical meetings, Momentum Aroostook celebrates our young civic or volunteer leaders' accolades through the Aroostook Achievers ceremony. In 2019 at our last in-person ceremony our group awarded 15 accolades to community members who went above & beyond in Aroostook County. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our group, our board's resilience shines through alternative virtual channels, ensuring that Momentum Aroostook continues to serve young professionals by educating, retaining, and showcasing the best of what "The County" can offer. During our events in 2020, our members have continued our commitment to support small, local businesses in Maine by choosing to stretch funds responsively, and alongside matching funds from our own steering members or community partners.

Our commitment to retention and leadership does not end in the meeting room. Our group has safely gathered for networking opportunities whether it was via Zoom for our Aroostook-themed trivia, or our socially distanced snowshoe outing during 2020. We are also planning a safe return to our former in-person networking social opportunities when we are given the green light by our State officials, where historically we have worked with college-bound students to help build their courage in public speaking and connecting with leaders to become more confident in their own abilities. We are very excited to continue our work and ensure that our County can meet the growing need for leaders in the next decade.

Without continued funding from the Realize Maine Network through MDF, our goal of creating & retaining tomorrow's leaders becomes difficult to achieve. As a Maine transplant who utilized Momentum Aroostook before becoming a committee member and now works in & proudly serves my community, I truly believe that Momentum Aroostook is an exemplary organization for young professionals who may have not found their true potential. We appreciate your consideration for funding, and our organization looks forward to continuing to showcase, celebrate, and build the best of young leaders in Northern Maine.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. McDonald'.

Brandon A. McDonald

Co-Chair, Momentum Aroostook

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