

November 16, 2021

The Honorable Alejandra Y. Castillo
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Suite 71014
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Castillo:

We write in support of the proposal submitted by the University of Maine and the Forest Opportunity Roadmap/Maine (FOR/Maine) Coalition to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) for its Accelerating the Northern Forest Bioeconomy: Through Innovation, Commercialization, Workforce and Community Redevelopment project. Their proposal builds upon EDA investments in the Northeastern forest economy and will advance the future of the region's forest products industry while strengthening rural communities.

Maine is a national leader in the forest products industry, with vast natural resources and a skilled workforce that has harvested, hauled, and processed wood for generations. Unfortunately, due to dramatic changes in the pulp and paper markets in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, the once strong sector that was the economic engine across rural northern and eastern Maine has suffered a long and serious decline. The transition to e-commerce, international competition for commodity products, and now the COVID-19 pandemic have all placed further strain on the industry.

Founded in response to an EDA-established team in 2016 to examine the drastic decline in the industry, the FOR/Maine Coalition is focused on rebuilding the Maine forest industry so it may continue to provide quality products both domestically and internationally and well-paying jobs across the region. This entity, which is supported by the private sector, EDA, and the State, is uniquely positioned to lead the Maine forest industry's post-pandemic recovery.

The University of Maine and FOR/Maine's proposal represents an opportunity for rural communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic to reinvigorate this key sector in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. Working with partners across Maine, the nation, and the European Union, this investment represents the opportunity to redevelop the destabilized Maine forest industry into an advanced manufacturing powerhouse and exporter of high-value forest products and biomaterials.

Thank you for your time and effort on behalf of the University of Maine and FOR/Maine. We urge EDA's careful consideration of their application, subject to all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that your staff please notify when a final decision has been made. Sincerely,

Senator Susan M. Collins

Senator Angus S. King, Jr.
Representative Chellie Pingree
Representative Jared F. Golden

December 2, 2021

The Honorable Alejandra Y. Castillo
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Suite 71014
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Castillo:

We write in strong support of the BioInnovation in the Bioeconomy Phase One application proposal submitted by the Roux Institute at Northeastern University, in cooperation with the Biomanufacturing Regional Industry Cluster Coalition, and in response to the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Build Back Better Regional Challenge. If funded, the Roux Institute and its coalition partners will move forward with Phase Two of the Build Back Better Regional Challenge for implementation of the Biomanufacturing Regional Industry Growth Cluster project.

Based in Portland, Maine, the Roux Institute of Northeastern University was established in 2020 to spur innovation, build talent, and drive economic growth in Portland, the state of Maine, and the Northeast region. The Institute brings together a unique partnership with industry, academia, and government, and serves as a linchpin in the acceleration of the Northeast entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Institute's role in this ecosystem will be particularly important as the state of Maine and the greater Northeast region head into a critical phase of post-pandemic economic recovery and revitalization.

The New England bioeconomy is emerging from the pandemic as an area of economic strength; however, our region must work to distribute that growth and opportunity more equitably. Currently, the hub of the regional bioeconomy is Cambridge/Boston. This hub has global preeminence and is growing at a rapid pace, but currently faces various constraints including a high cost of living and limited affordable real estate for lab space.

Northeastern University proposes to leverage its network of campuses across Portland, Maine, and Burlington, Massachusetts, as well as its partnership with Worcester Polytechnic Institute, to locate biomanufacturing prototype centers adjacent to that hub. This network of centers in geographically close and underserved areas will function to expand the bioeconomy in a targeted way to create jobs and growth in our communities.

This coalition-led regional network concept, with capital infrastructure and programmatic elements in Maine and Massachusetts, has the capacity and breadth to assist Mainers seeking well-paying jobs in a new line of work and position the region as a premier hub for biomanufacturing entrepreneurs from around the world. It will lead to the construction of new research and development facilities and the formation of unique training programs. The proposal is additionally supported by a variety of partners, including Worcester Polytechnic Institute, the Maine and Massachusetts Community College systems, FocusMaine, and an extraordinary group of industry partners representing the scope of the bioeconomy. We are confident that this partnership model will significantly increase the coalition's chances of facilitating large-scale impact.

We strongly support the BioInnovation in the Bioeconomy Phase One application proposal, and thank you for your time on behalf of the Roux Institute of Northeastern University and its coalition partners. We urge your careful consideration of this proposal, subject to all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that you please notify if you have any questions and when a final decision has been made. Sincerely,

Senator Susan M. Collins
Senator Angus S. King, Jr.
Representative Chellie Pingree
Representative Jared F. Golden