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My ancestors immigrated to the U.S. in the early and middle years of last century, fleeing political insecurity and the lack of economic opportunity. They were welcomed here and, with hard work, were able to build a better life for themselves and their family. My Greek grandfather would harness up his horse and bring firewood to new arrivals during the snowy winters of the Great Depression; he set an example that the next generations have followed. After college, I lived in Kenya where I taught in a girls' secondary school and, after graduate school, went to work for the Rockefeller Foundation, where I oversaw a national grant and investment portfolio and worked with innovative workforce, community, and economic development organizations across the U.S. It was during these years that I got to know and admire Coastal Enterprises and the CEI team.

I moved to Maine in 2005, and since then have dedicated myself to growing a more dynamic economy that produces more and better jobs across our state, with a focus on communities and people who are being left behind. Two years ago, I was privileged to become the CEO of CEI, following our founding CEO of 38 years, Ron Phillips. We are one of several OFN members that have been undergoing senior leadership transitions – translating what we have learned from past work with families and communities into strategies for our current economic and political reality.

I am excited to run for the OFN board and, if elected, believe that I will bring the following to the role:

- ✓ **Passion for building an economy that works for all, particularly people with low incomes and those who face barriers to their full participation in today's rapidly changing economy.** Our rural forest products, fisheries, farming and manufacturing industries are not creating and sustaining the same number of good jobs as they used to, and the services and “gig” economy jobs are not providing family-sustaining wages, benefits and skill development. CDFIs that are financing and coaching small business owners are testing pragmatic solutions for change.
- ✓ **Belief that helping entrepreneurs grow their companies, secure financing, and create and sustain good jobs is good for workers, businesses, communities and ultimately for our country.** We are looking to translate what we are learning from our work and our relationships with businesses to change the public narrative from a zero sum gain to an investment-oriented framing of these issues.
- ✓ **Insights from CEI's 40 years of work in Maine and with partners in rural America. Our country needs rural voices now more than ever if we are to develop an inclusive national economy.** Rural regions are being left behind, and mission investors like CDFIs must be at the table as policies to expand economic opportunity are crafted at the national and regional level.
- ✓ **A track record of proactive engagement with our Federal delegation and their staff, and Federal agencies such as the Small Business Administration, the Economic Development Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and others.** CEI has contributed to building the CDFI field and shaped policies relating to programs like the New Market Tax Credit and the SBA Microenterprise programs.

- ✓ **Experience in critically important adjacent fields in workforce development and philanthropy**, having worked with skills training organizations in cities like Boston, Fort Worth, Nashville and New York and for grantmakers including the Rockefeller and Maine-based Sewall foundations.
- ✓ **A track record of working across sectors with business leaders, researchers, nonprofits and government agencies**, in my role as the president of the Maine Technology Institute and as a funder working on sector-based skills training.
- ✓ **Bridging academic analysis and community development practice**, illustrated by directing the recent Harvard University study “Growing Maine’s Food Industry, Growing Maine.”

This year, CEI marked our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We celebrated our track record of impact in Maine and contributions to the community development field nationally. But there is much work to do. I’d be honored to work with all of you as we pioneer a more just, equitable and sustainable future for our communities and our nation. **OFN and its members can and should lead this work.**

CEI’s vision for a different future started with its very first loan to a fish processing business in midcoast Maine in 1977. CEI has worked with entrepreneurs seeking to start and grow businesses in Maine, and more recently, in rural regions across the U.S. through its financing subsidiaries. Founded by Ron Phillips, one of OFN’s Ned Gramlich Awardees, CEI is one of the oldest and largest rural community development financial institutions and has a long track record of partnership and policy advocacy nationally. In Maine, CEI worked with partners to launch two other CDFIs – Genesis Fund and Four Directions Development Corporation, a CDFI that serves Maine’s four Native American tribes. Nationally, CEI has partnered with peer groups like Rural LISC, the Triple Bottom Line Collaborative and is a member of the CDFI Coalition.

**At the heart of what we do is our respect and appreciation for the business owners we work with. Here are three of their stories:**

**Julie Swain** and her husband own a business in Skowhegan, Maine, that manufactures tick repellent apparel for people, dogs and horses. What started off as a home hobby business became a family business and, when their nearby manufacturing business was going to close, they came to Coastal Enterprises for financing to purchase the facility to keep the manufacturing of their products in Maine. Today they provide 15 good jobs for people in this rural community.

**Abdullahi Ali** was born in Somalia, grew up in a refugee camp in Kenya, and moved to Maine where he finished his education in social work. Through his work he found that many refugees suffered from post-traumatic stress and other mental illness, but many were not comfortable seeking care. He founded Gateway Community Services, which serves people and their families who have suffered deeply in their countries of origin and on their journeys to the U.S. Gateway employs social workers and other mental health professionals who come from countries in East and Central Africa and the Middle East as well as native Mainers. CEI financed the startup of this enterprise which has since expanded from Portland to Lewiston and Augusta.

In 2007, **Josh Broder** began working at Tilson Technology, an IT and network services firm with three employees, later becoming its CEO. Coastal Enterprises’ venture capital company, CEI Ventures, was Tilson’s first investor, paving the way for the firm to secure financing from traditional capital sources. Today Tilson employs over 400 people – just under 100 of them work in Maine and the rest across the country – and over half of its employees are veterans. Its annual sales last year were \$44 million.