



**Grayson Lookner**

P.O. Box 8264

Portland, ME, 04104

Phone: (207) 200-3860

[Grayson.Lookner@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Grayson.Lookner@legislature.maine.gov)

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

January 25, 2024

*Testimony of Representative Grayson Lookner in support of*  
**LD 1454, An Act Regarding the Distribution of Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer  
Tax**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation*

Good afternoon Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and honorable colleagues on the Committee on Taxation. My name is Grayson Lookner, and I represent House district 113 which includes part of Portland. I'm here today to testify in favor of **LD 1454, An Act Regarding the Distribution of Revenue from the Real Estate Transfer Tax.**

I'm proud to represent a district that contains two of the largest low income housing developments in the state – Riverton Park and Sagamore Village operated by the Portland Housing Authority, as well as Huston Commons, one of the first "housing first" developments in Maine, operated by the Preble Street Resource Center. My district also contains two of the largest low barrier shelters for individuals experiencing homelessness in our state. My city has been home to sprawling encampments, and I routinely see unhoused neighbors camping in all seasons on public lands. Everyday I am reminded of how the lack of resources and investment in housing contributes to the crisis in housing and homelessness that has been plaguing our state for far too long. We need solutions, and this bill could provide new means of creating desperately needed housing for middle and low income earners across our state.

While I've watched the housing crisis become more and more acute over the last 5 years – displacing many members of my community and prompting me to run for the legislature – I've also seen many folks moving to our state from places where they earn far more money than what employers in Maine can offer for the same work. I'm excited to welcome new neighbors from far and wide to our state, but the unfortunate side effect of this has been that these individuals can outbid lifelong Mainers looking to buy their

first home, often placing offers in cash for tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars over asking price, purchasing properties sight unseen and driving up housing costs even more. This, coupled with the speculative buying of real estate by national capital investment firms, and the booming market for luxury vacation homes in our state, has created a missed opportunity to raise needed revenue to address the housing crisis from those most able to contribute.

While we have made progress in addressing some aspects of the housing crisis through the work happening in the Joint Select Committee on Housing, on which I also serve, systemic solutions are lacking, and I believe this bill could help create those types of solutions. Specifically, mixed-income housing for middle-income and low-income earners is needed, and there is no dedicated source of revenue for creating that type of housing. The “missing middle” of housing development, housing for professionals such as teachers, firefighters, social workers, and others who provide invaluable services to their communities, but are unfortunately squeezed out of those communities because of housing costs, needs subsidy similar to how we subsidize low income housing, otherwise it won't get built. Building this type of housing has many benefits, including creating more low income housing, reducing rents across the board for everyone without resorting to regulation on the private rental market, and creating thriving communities for a broad cross section of Mainers. I believe this modest increase in the real estate transfer tax as proposed in this amendment could accomplish that.

The Maine RETT is among the lowest in the country, and it should remain so for low- and middle-income earners, but with this amendment we have a way to create solutions to the housing crisis in an equitable way.

Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I'm happy to answer any questions.