



Testimony of Greg Watson, Housing and Economic Development Director
of the City of Portland,
In Support of
LD 1041, An Act to Preserve Affordability in Publicly Assisted Housing Developments
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Greg Watson, Housing and Economic Development Director of the City of Portland, and I am here to testify in support of LD 1041, *An Act to Preserve Affordability in Publicly Assisted Housing Developments*. Portland is home to nearly 70,000 Mainers and a vibrant center for business, the arts, and tourism. As with many other municipalities in Maine, developing, maintaining, and preserving affordable housing is a major priority and something we think about every day.

This proposal would benefit municipalities, developers of affordable housing, and those who live in affordable housing by requiring owners of affordable housing to provide notice and make interested parties aware when affordability use restrictions may be expiring. This would create an opportunity for those in a position to extend affordability and provide protection for tenants by providing notice of a potential change in the status of their housing.

Extending affordability provisions of current affordable housing is not a radical new idea. Under current Maine law, Maine Housing has this ability and many tools to extend affordability, but they are not always able to do so. I view this proposal as way to continue to support Maine Housing in these efforts, creating a belt and suspenders approach to guarantee awareness of the timelines and opportunities around expiring affordable housing– the proposal essentially create a right of right opportunity to preserve affordable housing, rather than...

For an example of how this could play out, here in Portland, Munjoy South currently offers affordable housing to 140 income eligible residents between 50-80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. There is uncertainty about the current owners' intentions regarding a future expiring use event and there are numerous market developments planned nearby.

I think it is important to note that this proposal does not force owners of affordable housing developments to do anything. This proposal increases options by creating a choice for Maine Housing or an affordable housing partner to come in and prepare in advance to offer an opportunity to extend affordability, where that might not be guaranteed.

Importantly, this legislation anticipates that the landscape changes over time and recognizes that state, municipal leaders and property owners twenty-five years from now may not see the sunset of affordability provisions coming, thereby potentially jeopardizing important affordable housing.

Finally, this proposal serves to provide additional time to existing occupants of affordable housing that may be converting to market, the time to consider alternate plans for safe and affordable housing.

Thank you for your time today and for your consideration.