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March 25, 2025

Re: LD 970, An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing for Working Families by Expediting Reviews for Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. CHOM creates housing and inclusive communities for vulnerable populations in Maine.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 970, An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing for Working Families by Expediting Reviews for Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority.

This bill provides time frames within which a municipal licensing authority and the Department of Environmental Protection must make decisions on permit applications for the construction of affordable housing for which funding or credits from the Maine State Housing Authority are being sought. Under the bill, a municipal licensing authority must provide notice to an applicant as to the completeness of the application within 30 days after receipt. If no notice is provided to the applicant, the application is considered complete. Once the application is complete, the municipality must approve or disapprove the application within 120 days. Further, the bill requires the Department of Environmental Protection to approve or disapprove site location of development permits for such affordable housing construction within 30 days after receipt of the permit application.

As this Committee knows, MaineHousing and the Legislature have made substantial investments in affordable housing production in recent years. Yet these developments get caught up in multiple years of approval processes at the municipal and state level. These delays dramatically increase development costs, diluting the State's overall investment, and thwarting access to that housing for Maine people who need it desperately. The need for affordable and supportive housing already far exceeds the supply, particularly for homeless and special needs populations – these delays only worsen the affordable housing crisis in Maine.

Maine is facing a gap of 84,000 affordable homes over the next decade. Without creative solutions such as those that LD 970 would provide, we won't make a real difference in the lives of people in Maine with low incomes. And we won't make a real difference in ending homelessness.

This bill would help streamline Maine's permitting of state funded affordable housing by removing unnecessary, cumbersome red tape that only serves to increase their timeline and costs. This bill would create a pathway to more efficient, effective use of our state's finite resources for affordable housing development.

Please pass LD 970 so that we can all work together to address Maine's affordable housing crisis. We will all be better for it.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.