

Testimony Of Patrick Woodcock of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce

LD. 970, “An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing by Expediting Reviews for Affordable Housing Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority”

March 25, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the committee on housing and economic development, my name is Patrick Woodcock and I am the President and CEO of the Maine Chamber of Commerce, the largest statewide business organization.

Housing is one of the top priorities of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and encourages continued bipartisan work to unlock housing development to add jobs to the state, address the affordability challenge in Maine, and ultimately grow the state’s economy. This issue has grown in importance with housing being a top three issue for our members in our latest survey.

The Maine Chamber supports the legislation and wants to use this opportunity to highlight broader efforts at improving the permitting process at the state level. The recently released report from HR&A highlighted state permitting reforms as a key component of a comprehensive strategy to address Maine’s housing situation. The HR&A made this key finding:

Slow State review and unclear prioritization: Insufficient staffing capacity at key agencies, including DEP, DOT and MaineHousing, limit their ability to review projects quickly and with certainty. Smaller projects often experience faster review and fewer barriers. Without clear State prioritization, key agencies are not geared towards scaling up production.

The legislation does address prioritization by focusing DEP resources on projects that have been funded by Maine State Housing Authority. However, it should be noted that the report identifies that the prioritization of large projects would support the scale that is required to meet Maine’s 2030 housing production goal of over 80,000 units. As a result, we strongly would recommend that the Committee build on this legislation to prioritize large scale projects, expand permits by rule, and support the Department of Environmental Protection’s initiatives to improve the permitting process for all housing projects.