

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Testimony of Collin van der Veen – Gurnet Real Estate Group

4/9/2025

in favor of LD690 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Provide Funding for Affordable and Low-income Housing Programs - Sen. Teresa Pierce of Cumberland

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 690.

My name is Collin van der Veen, and I'm a principal at Gurnet Real Estate Group, a housing development firm focused on creating high-quality affordable and workforce housing across Maine. We're currently in pre-development on a 100% affordable housing community in Brunswick that will bring much-needed units to a market facing a critical shortage.

As a developer, one of the most difficult phases of any affordable housing project is the early stage—when substantial funds are required for design, engineering, environmental studies, and municipal approvals, but there's no guarantee of funding yet secured. Programs like the Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program are essential because they provide a financial backstop in the event that projects do not receive competitive Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. The presence of this kind of support gives us the confidence to move forward, take on early-stage risk, and advance projects that otherwise might not make it past the drawing board. Simply put: the more funding sources that exist, the more willing we and other developers will be to invest time and capital into getting critical projects off the ground.

Statewide, the need for housing is urgent and growing. Across Maine, the gap between housing availability and demand continues to widen, pushing more families into unstable living situations or out of communities entirely. While previous funding efforts have helped create new homes, they've mostly come from one-time allocations that have not been replenished. The demand, however, continues to grow. Without new and consistent investment, our pipeline of affordable housing will slow dramatically—at a time when we can least afford it.

Earlier this year, the state partnered with HR&A Advisors to chart a path toward producing 80,000 new homes by 2030. One of their key recommendations was increasing public investment in housing development. It's clear that without meaningful funding, that target will not be achievable.

The Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program and the Affordable Home Ownership Program are two proven tools that have helped create homes in communities from the northern tip of Aroostook to the southern coast of York County. But without renewed funding from the bond proposed in LD 690, these programs will sunset this year. The Rural Program has seen more than \$50 million in requests from viable housing developments but has only \$25 million to allocate—leaving projects in a dozen towns stranded. Similarly, the Home Ownership Program is short \$3 million to fully fund shovel-ready homeownership projects. These are real homes in real communities that will not be built unless additional funding is secured.

Failing to act would mean leaving behind housing that's ready to go—along with the jobs, tax revenue, and community benefits those homes would bring. It would also mean another missed opportunity to stabilize Maine's housing crisis. Supporting this bond is not just about building housing—it's about investing in the future of Maine's workforce, economy, and well-being.

Thank you for your consideration, and I urge you to vote in favor of LD 690.

Respectfully,
Collin van der Veen

Check out these fast facts on housing affordability in Maine.

Maine is short 40,000 homes now, and needs another 40,000 by 2030.

Only
9 of **22**

new rural rental housing projects that will be able to get built because there is no more funding left.

2%

vacancy in Maine – making it impossible to find housing.



47

Available rental homes for every 100 households with low-incomes in Maine.



50%

Increase in Maine housing prices since 2020 - 9th highest in the nation at the end of 2024.



33%

Increase in Maine wages since 2020 – making housing costs out of reach.
