

Hello,

My name is Maya Srinivassan, and I am the owner of Great Northern Builders (GNB), based in South Berwick, ME. GNB is celebrating its 23rd year in business. We specialize in residential remodeling – working with Maine’s largely aging housing stock to restore, preserve and improve the quality of life for homeowners.

Professionalism, high quality construction, great communication and satisfied clients who are happy to refer us to their friends and family, and who frequently hire us for additional projects over the years, are the hallmarks of GNB’s business model.

As owner, I became a member of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) in 2010. I served on its boards for several years and was the association president in 2021 and 2022. Via the NAHB, I hold certifications as a Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR) and a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). I am also a member of an NAHB 20 Club, a group of approximately 20 remodeling companies from across the country. As a club, we meet twice a year, and because we are non-competing, we are able to be transparent with all of our business information, helping each other, offering advice, support and lessons learned on topics such as construction techniques, client relationships, financial management and legal basics. My ongoing involvement with both the NAHB and the Maine homebuilders association, my 20 Club, and general continuing education allow me to confidently lead Great Northern Builders, ensuring that we are here to assist homeowners with quality and lasting renovations for many years to come.

My focus on continuing education is characteristic of every member of the GNB team. Whether it be learning installation techniques for multi-point panel doors, understanding Energy Recovery Ventilation units, or Maine’s recently implemented building code, continuing education is a constant for the GNB team. The rate of change in our industry is rapid, clients increasing demand for higher end and more complex products, combined with more stringent codes and the pressures of rapidly escalating costs, mean that as a company, we are learning every day, and then in turn helping our clients to understand their choices, advising them, and taking the time and care required to install each product according to its specifications.

While all of this should simply be business as usual for a residential remodeling company, unfortunately, it is anything but for many so-called contractors in Maine.

We receive calls on a weekly basis from homeowners who have been misled, left in the lurch, or simply stolen from by individuals calling themselves construction professionals.

A few examples that have come across my desk:

A homeowner was given a rough cost to renovate a bathroom by a contractor. The contractor said the project would be billed on a time and materials basis. The contractor said they could start the project in June 2024 and that he required a \$20,000 deposit in order to order materials etc. GNB received a call in November 2024. The contractor was unreachable, no work had been conducted, the money and him, both gone. The homeowner just wanted to get the project done, and had already reconciled themselves to the lost time and money.

Some of you may have heard of the recent case of a Construction company in the seacoast area. This company was charging high rates, promoting themselves broadly on social media, and many homeowners in our area became clients of theirs. Their typical MO based on a few of the local stories homeowners have shared with me: taking deposits and then not scheduling work, beginning work but not completing it, sending crews unannounced with no project manager to supervise them, work being performed that did not match the plans, work performed that did not meet code requirements, abandoning projects mid-way, sometimes leaving tools and equipment behind. Seemingly, this company was essentially engaged in a Ponzi scheme, using the deposits from projects to fund the continued payments to owners and staff, without completing projects correctly, etc.

Some of you may also remember the story a few years back of a family in Gray, Maine, who gave over \$100,000 to a contractor to build them a dance studio for their three children over their garage. The contractor disappeared mid-projects, leaving the homeowners with a lien on their property by the unpaid lumber yard, as well as several unpaid subcontractors, their garage was left open to the elements, and the homeowners had no remaining funds to finish the projects and pay the debts. The Maine HBRA stepped in, and GNB and several other companies donated labor to complete the project, the lumber yard agreed to forgive the amount owing.

The problem is not only one of poor construction techniques, it is also mismanagement of time, and money and deliberate deception in some cases.

Contractor licensing in our state would allow for the state to require a minimum of training and continuing education of contractors, not only in construction techniques but in all the basics of running a successful business. Even something like a contractor not understanding how to price their projects correctly is detrimental to homeowners, because a year from now, if you have a problem you need warranty service on, you want that contractor to still be in business. Contractor licensing would allow the state to require that contractors receive basic training in all of these aspects of being a successful contractor. This would in turn elevate the quality of work overall that Maine contractors are providing, which would help increase the trust that homeowners have towards contractors. Currently, we at GNB have to spend a lot of time building trust

with homeowners, explaining to them how we are different from your typical local contractor, because so many of them have had negative experiences. Licensing would therefore allow our state to begin to improve the outcome of residential construction projects across Maine.

I do urge the committee to proceed with caution and not create an overregulated environment that will certainly spark resentment and lash back in the community of legitimate contractors. Start with something simple and manageable, and build intentionally from there over the years, always in consultation with industry professionals and homeowners alike.

Thank you,