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May 13, 2025

Re: LD 1829, An Act to Build Housing for Maine Families and Attract Workers to Maine Businesses by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal Land Use Decisions

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 1829, An Act to Build Housing for Maine Families and Attract Workers to Maine Businesses by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal Land Use Decisions. *This bill makes the following changes in the laws governing municipal land use decisions:*

- 1. It establishes the Housing Development Resolution Board within the judicial branch. The board has concurrent jurisdiction with the Superior Court to hear appeals of final decisions by municipal reviewing authorities regarding housing and housing development. Decisions of the board are binding and not appealable to either the Superior Court or the Supreme Judicial Court.*
- 2. It requires a municipality to allow a certain number of dwelling units per lot depending on whether the lot is in a designated growth area or is served by public water and sewer.*
- 3. It requires members of municipal planning committees to attend land use planning training.*
- 4. It requires a municipality to allow an affordable housing development to exceed any height restrictions by no more than 14 feet.*
- 5. It prohibits a municipality from enacting an ordinance that limits the rate of growth of residential development in a designated growth area.*
- 6. It prohibits a municipality from establishing or enforcing a minimum lot size requirement greater than 5,000 square feet per dwelling unit to be served by public water and public sewer. And*
- 7. It limits municipal review for an affordable housing density bonus and a development with 4 or fewer units to administrative review.*

As this Committee knows, MaineHousing and the Legislature have made substantial investments in reducing barriers to affordable housing production in recent years. However, more work remains. The rising cost of housing is making it very difficult for Maine families, seniors, and essential workers to afford to live and work.

And due to local barriers, too often developments get caught up in multiple years of approval processes. These delays increase development costs, which dilutes the State's overall investment, reduces the number of affordable housing projects that can be funded, and thwarts 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 roadblocks 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 that reduce barriers to affordable housing production such as those that LD 1829 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 establish a fair, expert board to review local housing decisions quickly. It would also reduce barriers to production by removing unnecessary, cumbersome land use barriers and red tape that only serves to increase timelines and costs and reduce the number of units produced. This bill would create a pathway to more efficient, effective use of our state's finite resources for affordable housing development.

Please pass LD 1829 so that we can all work together to address Maine's affordable housing crisis, and Maine be a state in which everyone can live, work, and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.