



MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development

***Testimony of Laura Mitchell, Executive Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition,
in favor of LD1921- An Act to Create a Statewide Housing Resolution Board, by Representative Gere***

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. I am Laura Mitchell, executive director of the **Maine Affordable Housing Coalition**. I am testifying in favor of LD1921 on behalf of the coalition, **a nonprofit with 140 member businesses and more than 2,000 individual members**.

LD 1921 provides a process MAHC supports to ensure laws are abided by in the housing approval process. Right now those decisions are being made by volunteers without consistent training. A Housing Resolution Board provides an inexpensive, fast pathway, staffed by experts to provide a pathway for municipalities and developers to stay within the legal framework for approving housing, rather than the emotion driven, non-ordinance related, gray area testimony that volunteers hear from their neighbors at planning board meetings. These pleas are often from a few voices that are comfortably housed and have the resources and acumen to fight housing for the people we need, rely upon and love in our community – like EMS workers, teachers, police officers, childcare workers, medical assistants, and more. Sometimes, even against housing for doctors, lawyers, and other higher income workers.

Building any type of housing in Maine is extremely difficult and expensive. These costs and our home shortage are not isolated to one town or region. It is structural, systemic, and statewide. A statewide solution is needed. Media articles of local housing approval processes being swayed against people with “low-income”, or false narratives about school populations, character, etc. run from Kittery, Cape Elizabeth and Cumberland to Kingfield, Bangor, and Greenville. The myths that decisions are made on are not legally binding, force reductions in units, and other project changes that often make them infeasible.

Establishing the Housing Resolution Board is a critical policy step. Without a fair, efficient, and expert appeals process, developers and housing nonprofits will continue to face unpredictable, costly legal battles even when they meet all local and state requirements.

Both New Hampshire and Connecticut show us that a housing resolution board is a proven approach for balancing local review with the urgent need for statewide housing production. This bill would bring us up to speed with regional peers who recognize that predictable, fast, and fair land use review processes are essential for solving a statewide housing crisis. These housing boards have increased housing production, ensured due process, and limited costly litigation across New England, **whilst delivering findings equally in favor of municipalities and developers.**

For example, in NH the board provides a much faster, more thorough, less expensive, more responsive, more transparent, and much less intimidating alternative to Superior Court. Superior Court also generally prioritizes criminal cases over land use, unnecessarily dragging out the timeline for their land use decisions.

No Superior Court judge or clerk has the breadth or depth of expertise in the disciplines represented by members of the proposed Housing Resolution Board - land use attorney, professional engineer/or surveyor - bringing years of specialized experience and expertise to bear on every mediation. Housing is a priority in every district in Maine. This Board would be the only State center dedicated to facilitating and expediting review of local housing decisions in accordance with existing statutes and local ordinances. Please support this bill, we can't continue to invest in housing only to have it squandered in decision making processes.

3i Housing of Maine
35 Weston Avenue
AARP Maine
ABG Consulting, Gray
ABC Engineering, Inc.
Allied Cook Construction, Portland
Anew Development LLC, Portland
Apartments for People LLC, Belfast
Archetype Architects, Portland
Associated General Contractors of Maine
Auburn Housing Authority
Augusta Housing Authority
Avesta Housing, Portland
Bangor Area Homeless Shelter
Bangor Housing
Bangor Savings Bank
Bank of New Hampshire, Falmouth
Bath Housing
Bath Savings Institution
Belknap Enterprise
Benchmark Construction, Westbrook
Boston Financial Investment Management
Bowman Constructors, Newport
Brunswick Housing Authority
Camden National Bank
Carpenter Associates
Catholic Charities of Maine
CEI, Brunswick
CH Architecture, Portland
City of Portland Department of Housing
Clark Insurance, Portland
Community Concepts, Lewiston
Community Housing of Maine, Portland
Consigni Construction Co., Inc.
Cooperative Development Institute, South Freeport
Cooperative Fund of the Northeast
CREA, LLC
Credent Associates, Westbrook
Cross Financial Corp., Portland
Cumberland County
Curtis Theater, Portland
CWS Architects, Portland
Developers Collaborative, Portland
Development Services of New England, Freeport
Dovetail Consulting
DrummondWoodsum, Portland
EBC Construction, Inc.
Dunbar & Brown Construction
Eagle Point Development, LLC
East Peabody Consulting Group, Augusta
Eric Burmeister
Evernorth, Portland
Falmouth, Town of
Fort Fairfield Residential Development Corp.
Four Directions Development Corporation, Orono
Freeport Community Services
Freeport Housing Trust
Furniture Friends
Gannett Construction, Augusta
Gawron Turgeon Architects, Scarborough
Genesis Community Loan Fund, Brunswick
Gorham Savings Bank
Great Falls Construction, Gorham
Grommes Pulaski Consulting LLC, Portland
GrowSmart Maine
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Portland
Habitat for Humanity York County
Hancock Lumber, Casco
Healthy Androscoggin, Lewiston
Hebert Construction
Home Start, Peaks Island
Homeless Voices for Justice, Portland
Housing Foundation, Orono
Housing Initiatives of New England, Portland
Housing Partnership, Portsmouth, NH
Hunt Capital Partners LLC, El Paso, TX
Island Institute, Rockland
Islesboro Affordable Property
Jensen Baird Gardner & Henry, Portland
John Antor, Consultant, Portland
Kaplan Thompson Architects, Portland
Kennebec Savings Bank, Augusta
Kennebec Valley Community Action, Waterville
Kennebunk Savings
KeyBank
Knox County Homeless Coalition
Lake City Investments, LLC
Landry/French Construction, Scarborough
LaRoche Consulting, LLC, Augusta
Lassel Architects, South Berwick
LB Development Partners, Portland
LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire
Lewiston Housing Authority
M&T Bank
Machias Savings Bank
Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services
Maine Community Action Partnership
Maine Community Bank
Maine Department of Health & Human Services
Maine Equal Justice
Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Maine Public Health Association
Maine Real Estate Managers Association
Maine State Building & Construction Trades
Maine Workforce Housing LLC, Portland
Mana en Mano, Millbridge
Mans Development LLC, Yarmouth
Mascoma Bank
Midcoast Regional Housing Trust
NBT Bank
Nickerson & O'Day, Inc., Bangor
North Haven Sustainable Housing
Northeast Rental Housing
Norway Savings Bank
Old Town Housing Authority
Owens O'Keefe, South Portland
Penobscot General Constructors
Penquis, Bangor
Perrin's United Bank
PM Construction
Portland Builders
Portland Housing Authority
Preble Street, Portland
Preservation Management, South Portland
Preti Floherty, Portland
Raise-Op Housing Cooperative, Lewiston
Realty Resources Management
Rental Housing Alliance of Southern Maine
Rick Whiting
Rumford, Town of
Sanford Housing Authority
Scott Simons Architects, Portland
Sea Coast Management Company, Topsham
Shalom House, Portland
Silver Street Development Corporation, Portland
South Portland Housing Authority
Southport Group, Yarmouth
St. Germain
Sunrise Opportunities, Machias
S.W. Cole Engineering, Gray
Santanton Company
TD Bank
Tadford Housing, Brunswick
The Caleb Group, Saco
The Eagle Point Companies, South Portland
The Housing Foundation
The Park Danforth, Portland
Thornton Tomasetti, Portland
Through These Doors, Portland
Total Construction Management, Winterport
TPD Construction Co., Sanford
United Way of Greater Portland
Utile, Inc.
Veterans Inc., Lewiston
Volunteers of America of Northern NE
Washington County Assoc for Ret. Citizens
Westbrook Housing Authority
Western Maine Community Action, E. Wilton
Winton Scott Architects
Wishcamper Companies, Portland
WMC & Associates
Wright-Ryan Construction, Portland
Yarmouth Housing Collaborative
Year-Round Housing Corp., Long Island
York County Community Action, Sanford
York Housing Authority
Zachos Construction, Freeport
Zero Energy Design
Zion Energy Services