



Testimony of

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Before

The Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development (132nd)

In Support of

LD 1921: An Act to Create a Statewide Housing Resolution Board

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, I am Erik Jorgensen Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony in support of **LD 1921, An Act to Create a Statewide Housing Resolution Board.**

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants,

the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

MaineHousing does not typically testify on land use and zoning bills – but in the case of LD 1921, we wanted to weigh in with support, simply because this bill seeks to squarely address a problem that has grown more common as a barrier to our state reaching its housing goals. A developer follows all the rules, goes through the various municipal processes required to get a project off the ground, only to see the project fall apart due to local zoning board problems or endless challenges and appeals. Our experience has shown that projects in any part of the state can be derailed in this way, by small groups of citizens seeking to block them, especially by appeals that can “run out the clock” until a developer simply gives up. We see this happening in large towns and small, in different parts of the state. No region seems to be immune to this.

If Maine is to realize its well-publicized housing production goals, we feel that there is an urgent need to streamline and make predictable the development process. Having some sort of housing resolution board, as proposed in LD 1921, would be an important tool to help prevent projects that are following the rules from being sidelined.

The specifics of such a board would need to be worked out, and we understand that the Judicial Branch may not be the optimal place to house such a program. That said, we hope the legislature will consider this concept, along with the details of how such a board would work. MaineHousing is not testifying on those mechanics, just on the merit of this idea as a possible and reasonable tool to facilitate housing

production in Maine. Versions of a statewide resolution board have been proven to work in neighboring states, including New Hampshire, where such a board was established in 2020. We think it could be very helpful here, as well.

People in every municipality are looking for housing, and it would therefore seem fair that every municipality should have a role in getting the state out of its current housing shortage. LD 2003 started this work a few years ago, and this bill simply continues that progress in a logical direction. We are grateful to Rep. Gere for bringing it forward.