

Hello Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the joint standing committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the joint standing committee of Housing and Economic Development.

My name is Carter Bennett, I go to Maranacook Community High School, and I live in Wayne. I'll be testifying in support of LD 2212. I want to give you the perspective of a young person. I'm in high school, and soon I'll be in college. After that, I'm going to have to make decisions about where I'm going to live and work. Maine has always been my home, and I want it to stay that way.

But whether Maine will remain affordable is increasingly in doubt. The income necessary to buy a house in Maine has exploded, and given the slow pace in homebuilding, the required income will likely increase. According to a study on Maine's housing needs, the income needed to purchase a median-price home in 2014 was 48 thousand dollars. By 2022, that number had more than doubled to 106 thousand dollars. It's no wonder why youth leave Maine and don't come back. I remember in school, we had a discussion about what we wanted for our futures. When we were asked who wanted to stay in Maine, not many kids raised their hands. That moment stuck with me because it was when I realized that loving Maine and being able to afford to stay here are two different things.

The other students might want to leave Maine for different reasons, things like job opportunities. But things like job opportunities still come back to affordable housing access. When the median income of a Mainer is tens of thousands of dollars less than the income needed to buy a house, and when the average rent has increased by almost 50 percent over 20 years due to a lack of housing, it's clear that strong action is needed.

Maine's future is dependent on affordable housing, but we are behind. Not enough homes and apartment units are being built. Families are being squeezed by rising costs. For many first responders, childcare workers, and teachers, it doesn't make sense to stay in Maine. We can't build healthy communities this way. And when workers can't find homes, struggling small businesses are harmed.

Next I want to speak to the fiscal cost of LD 2212. That \$70 million seems large, but imagine the alternative! Spending more on homeless shelters, emergency healthcare, and infrastructure while young workers flee the state. When families have stable housing, they can spend more money at local businesses. This investment also means a bigger tax base. More people will work, live, and shop in Maine. It will also slow the flow of graduates leaving our state, making sure the investments taxpayers make in education don't go to waste. 70 million dollars now can prevent greater costs down the road.

LD 2212 will help all Mainers: rural and urban, renters and homeowners, and young and old Mainers. I ask you to vote in support of LD 2212, and ensure a strong, affordable future for the thousands of kids in Maine.