

Testimony of Patrick Woodcock
Before the Joint Standing Committees on Housing and Economic Development
In Support of L.D. 2224
“An Act to Reduce Certain Costs Associated with Residential Construction”

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Patrick Woodcock, and I am here on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, representing a network of more than 5,000 businesses across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of L.D. 2224, “An Act to Reduce Certain Costs Associated with Residential Construction.”

As the Committee is aware, L.D. 2224 is the product of last session’s resolve that created a working group to examine regulatory barriers to housing construction. I want to thank this Committee for initiating that effort. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce was an active participant in the working group, and I commend the Governor, the Mills Administration, and the many stakeholders who contributed to thoughtful and informed discussions. The final report contains important recommendations for lowering the cost of residential construction in Maine.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce supports L.D. 2224 as drafted. However, we believe failing to include several additional proposals discussed by the working group would represent a missed opportunity. A number of these ideas had substantial support among stakeholders but were not included in the final bill because they did not receive unanimous agreement. If Maine is serious about reducing the cost of building housing, leadership will be required to advance reforms that meaningfully address cost drivers.

Specifically, we recommend the Committee consider incorporating the following proposals:

- 1) **Single Egress Construction.** Allow residential buildings up to six stories to be constructed with a single stair. This reform would make smaller infill apartment buildings financially viable and reduce construction costs associated with redundant corridors and structural requirements.
- 2) **Reduce Mandatory Municipal Review.** Expand the municipal subdivision review threshold from three lots to up to five lots. This would reduce regulatory burdens and delays for small housing developments.
- 3) **Reduce Sprinkler Requirements for Small Apartments.** Increase the residential sprinkler threshold from three units to five units, aligning requirements more closely with the scale of smaller multifamily buildings.
- 4) **Eliminate Sprinkler Requirements for Single-Family Housing.** Prohibit municipalities from requiring residential sprinklers in single-family homes, which can add significant costs for new home construction.

- 5) **Affordable Housing Experience on the MUBEC Board.** Add a member with affordable housing development experience to the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Board to ensure that cost impacts of code decisions are fully considered.
- 6) **Pragmatic Elevators.** Allow smaller, readily available elevator models in buildings up to three stories where elevators are not otherwise required. This would expand accessibility options while keeping projects financially feasible.

Taken together, these reforms would help address several of the regulatory cost drivers identified by the working group and would make it easier to build the housing Maine urgently needs.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.