



Testimony of

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Before

The Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Neither For Nor Against

LD 299 (REVISED SPONSOR AMENDMENT MARCH 9 2026)

An Act to Build a Viable Future for Maine Agriculture.

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Erik Jorgensen Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony neither for nor against the March 9 Revised Sponsor Amendment of LD 299, now titled *An Act to Build a Viable Future for Maine Agriculture*.

The Maine State Housing Authority is Maine's housing finance agency, created by the Legislature in 1969 to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are structured as an independent agency to utilize effective private methods of finance for public purposes, to be independent, and responsive. In addition to issuing bonds to finance affordable housing, our agency is authorized to act for the state in administering several federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization and fuel assistance; two housing block grants; the

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

My testimony today concerns the Real Estate Transfer Tax. We were not aware of plans to use this revenue source for the purposes of an agricultural grant program, and when we read the initial LD 299 amendment, we became very concerned that it would interfere with Maine's primary source of ongoing funding for housing activities.

OFPR has since provided a revised amendment (Dated March 9, 2026) that clearly shows how LD 299 funding is intended to come from the portion of the transfer tax that would otherwise be sent to the General Fund. This has eased our agency's worries. We do wish, however, to underscore our hope that the Committee will hold the line on this issue and not let any additional amendments harm the carefully structured transfer tax cascade that now supports everything from affordable housing production to homelessness programs, to shelters, low-income home repair programs, lead abatement, and other critical activities.

Funding from the transfer tax is fully allocated and essential to these and other programs. The RETT was heavily restructured earlier in the 132nd legislature through LD 1082, and we would urge that housing activities be held harmless if the Committee chooses to use this source of revenue.

More than \$90,000,000 of Real Estate Transfer tax revenue has been diverted from housing programs to support general fund needs since 2005. We are, therefore,

always concerned when we see proposals, however meritorious, that further threaten (or even appear to threaten) this source of funding.

Thank you.