

Testimony in opposition to LD 214, “An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Zoning and Land Use Restrictions to Limit Certain Requirements to Municipalities with a Population of More than 10,000,” LD 665, “An Act to Extend the Date by Which Compliance is Required for Affordable Housing Development, Increased Numbers of Dwelling Units and Accessory Dwelling Units,” and LD 1154, “An Act Regarding Accessory Dwelling Units and Municipal Zoning Ordinances.”

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Good afternoon, chairpersons Gere and Pierce, and all members of the Housing Committee. My name is Josie Phillips, and I am representing Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am testifying in opposition to LDs 214, 665, and 1154 because they would significantly hinder much of the progress made in recent legislative sessions towards meeting the housing production needs of Maine communities. In doing so, they would also hurt the wellbeing of Maine families and the stability of the state economy.

More specifically, these bills would weaken LD 2003, passed in the 130th legislature last year. The provisions included in LD 2003 will help us reduce the statewide shortage of affordable housing by increasing the allowed density of affordable housing developments and allowing for accessory dwelling units to be added onto existing residences. The need for these zoning reforms is severe, as the state has been chronically underproducing housing.ⁱ Instead of improving Maine’s ability to produce and preserve affordable housing, LDs 214, 665, and 1154 would weaken the state’s ability to quickly meet these goals.

LD 214 would limit LD 2003 to only apply to municipalities with populations greater than 10,000, but the affordable housing crisis is not limited to urban centers. Maine Housing has identified that in every county except Aroostook, the average home price exceeds what is affordable to a family earning the average income. This situation is even more dire for renters, as there is not a single area in the state where the fair market rent for a two-bedroom unit is affordable to the average renter household.ⁱⁱ The lack of affordable housing is impacting all areas of the state, and any policy solutions should reflect this by increasing housing production in both rural and urban areas.

LD 665 would delay the requirements enacted in LD 2003 by two years. Maine’s families and workforce cannot afford to wait this long. The shortage of affordable housing is already having severe impacts to the wellbeing of Mainersⁱⁱⁱ and the health of the state economy.^{iv} Homelessness in Maine is increasing,^v and the lack of affordable housing is an impediment to economic growth, as workers are unable to find housing they can afford within a reasonable distance from their jobs.^{vi} Multifamily housing development in the Northeast region takes more than 20 months to complete, on average,^{vii} and LD 665 would add further delay to these developments.

LD 1154 would significantly hinder LD 2003’s effectiveness by removing the requirement for municipalities to allow people to attach accessory dwelling units to their residential property. Enabling the production of accessory dwelling units can be a rapid, cost-effective way to increase the stock of affordable housing in Maine.^{viii} As such, this committee should search for

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ways to make the addition of accessory dwelling units easier and more accessible to Mainers of all income levels,^{ix} not grant municipalities more leeway to further restrict housing production.

LD 2003 was a critical first step towards enabling the state to meet its goals of housing production, which in turn enables Maine's residents and economy to be healthier and more resilient. Taken in concert, LDs 214, 665, and 1154 would limit, delay, or roll back much of this progress. Mainers' need for affordable housing is only growing stronger. Now is the time for the legislature to consider how to build upon the progress already made, not step back. Because these bills would hurt Maine's ability to meet its current and future housing needs, I urge this committee to vote no on LDs 214, 665, and 1154.

ⁱ Up for Growth, "2022 Housing Underproduction in the U.S." <https://upforgrowth.org/apply-the-vision/housing-underproduction/>

ⁱⁱ Maine Housing, "Housing in Maine: An Overview." <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/8866>

ⁱⁱⁱ Portland Press Herald, "Scenes from the affordable housing crisis." <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/02/12/scenes-from-the-affordable-housing-crisis/>

^{iv} The Courier-Gazette, "State Economist sees challenges from inflation, housing crisis, work force shortage." https://knox.villagesoup.com/news/state-economist-sees-challenges-from-inflation-housing-crisis-work-force-shortage/article_794367c9-2155-591c-b393-7d23a191e4ae.html

^v Central Maine News Agency, "Homeless in Maine: Record-setting estimates come as winter's bite threatens the vulnerable." <https://www.centralmaine.com/2022/12/04/homeless-in-maine-record-setting-estimates-come-as-winters-bite-threatens-the-vulnerable/>

^{vi} Spectrum Local News, "Maine's shipyards struggle to find housing for workers." <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/news/2023/02/07/maine-s-shipyards-struggle-to-find-housing-for-workers>

^{vii} Census Bureau, "Average Length of Time from Start to Completion of New Privately Owned Residential Buildings." https://www.census.gov/construction/nrc/pdf/avg_starttocomp.pdf

^{viii} Freddie Mac, "ADUs Offer Promise as a Viable Affordable Housing Supply Solution." <https://sf.freddiemac.com/articles/insights/adus-offer-promise-as-a-viable-affordable-housing-supply-solution>

^{ix} Urban Institute, "To Unleash Housing Supply, Allow and Finance Accessory Dwelling Units." <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/unleash-housing-supply-allow-and-finance-accessory-dwelling-units>