



MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

131st Legislature

Joint Select Committee on Housing

Testimony of Laura Mitchell, Executive Director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition on April 14, 2023

in favor of LD226 An Act to Address Maine's Affordable Housing Crisis

Good afternoon, Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing. My name is Laura Mitchell, I serve as the Executive Director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, a nonprofit organization of more than 140 Maine housing development, building, design, shelter, and housing organizations. We work to address Maine's housing crisis by advocating for the creation and preservation of housing for all people in Maine.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in favor of LD226 An Act to Address Maine's Affordable Housing Crisis sponsored by Representative Millett. This bill provides \$200 million to increase the affordable housing stock in Maine. \$100 million in the 2023-2024 fiscal year and the other \$100 million in the 2024 to 2025 fiscal year.

Maine is decades behind investing in housing and compared to other New England states has invested far less of its Federal ARPA funding in building housing. Maine is short more than 20,000 homes for low-income people. As a result, Maine has reached record levels of people living outside, Maine is #2 in the nation for the lowest rental vacancy rate, evictions are increasing, there are 15,000 Maine people on wait lists for housing vouchers, and Bangor area seniors are on a 7 plus year wait list for affordable housing.

Maine Housing is currently out of funding to build more affordable housing in Maine. Now is the time to support LD226 and this historic investment that will quickly be put to use building homes for Maine people. Maine's development and construction companies are ready to build affordable housing. A recent survey by MAHC of 34 developers, highlighted a pipeline of 2,400+ units of housing in the next 2-3 years. From the construction side, just 5 construction companies had the capacity in the next two years to build 1,100+ affordable homes. We know there are many more builders who have capacity that the survey didn't capture. There are affordable housing projects across Maine that are ready to begin construction, in Cumberland, in Bangor, in Belfast, and many other towns - if this funding is made available.

MAHC supports LD226, because housing is a crisis impacting every town and person in Maine. Now is the time for bipartisan action to build housing, so all Maine people have a home. Maine can and should lead in New England investing in affordable housing for Maine's most vulnerable residents. LD226 starts to catch Maine up so housing demand doesn't outstrip supply for another 3 decades.

Maine needs to be building at least 1,000 new units of affordable housing a year for Maine's housing supply to begin to meet the current demand. Maine hasn't done that since the 1970s. The number one barrier to addressing Maine's housing crisis is a lack of funding to build affordable housing. The policy solution is to invest in building affordable housing.

I am testifying today in favor of LD 226 and urge you to support this step forward. Because all people in Maine deserve a home. Thank you.