

Testimony in support of LD 1673, “An Act to Encourage Affordable Housing and Mixed-use Development by Establishing a Thriving Corridors Program.”Josie Phillips, Policy Fellow
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Good morning, chairpersons Gere and Pierce, and all members of the Housing committee. My name is Josie Phillips, and I'm representing Maine Center for Economic Policy. I'm testifying in favor of LD 1673 because it would promote efficient city planning that meets the housing and transportation needs of Mainers. Walkable cities with ample housing are more economically productive and provide significant benefits to their residents' health, economic mobility, and general satisfaction. Because of this, encouraging cities to develop high-density corridors with housing and commercial services close together would contribute to the state's economic growth.

I and many others have testified before this committee on the urgent need to increase housing production across the state. This remains true, and LD 1673 would help accomplish this goal by providing funding and technical assistance to municipalities looking to redevelop their downtown areas or other high-use corridors. Based on its housing production merits alone, LD 1673 would warrant serious consideration.

LD 1673 would not just promote housing blindly across the state but instead would encourage housing to be developed in areas where efficiency can be maximized, both from the residents' and local governments' perspectives. According to the World Economic Forum, the costs of building and maintaining denser, walkable urban areas are a tenth to a twentieth that of building and maintaining more driving-oriented suburban areas.ⁱ Developing denser neighborhoods around key services like grocery stores and other public services also has significant benefits to the environment, as they encourage people to use more environmentally friendly methods of transportation, like walking and mass transit.ⁱⁱ Walkable cities are typically more economically productive and are better able to attract new workers.ⁱⁱⁱ There is also evidence to suggest that living in walkable neighborhoods can make residents happier,^{iv} healthier,^v more financially stable in adulthood (for children who grow up in walkable neighborhoods),^{vi} and more likely to spend money in their local economy.^{vii} Developing walkable neighborhoods may also benefit older Mainers by providing more opportunities for walking and providing alternative methods of transportation should they become unable to operate a car.^{viii}

The benefits of thoughtfully planned, dense, walkable neighborhood development are profound for everyone. Residents benefit from neighborhoods that encourage physical and social activity while ensuring that goods and services are easily accessible. City officials benefit from a more efficient use of municipal resources which can then be reinvested in their residents. The entire state benefits from the increased economic activity, which can then attract workers considering relocating to Maine. Because of these significant and widespread benefits, as well as the promise this bill has in addressing Maine's affordable housing crisis, I encourage this committee to vote yes on LD 1673.

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ⁱ World Economic Forum, "Why walkable urban areas are America's efficient economic engines." <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/why-walkable-urban-areas-are-america-s-efficient-economic-engines/>

ⁱⁱ Brookings Institute, "Why 'activity centers' are key to greener commutes." <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2022/11/29/why-activity-centers-are-key-to-greener-commutes/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Brookings Institute, "The economic power of walkability in metro areas." <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/07/12/the-economic-power-of-walkability-in-metro-areas/>

^{iv} Forbes, "Walkable Neighborhoods Are Happy Neighborhoods Finds Study." <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carltonreid/2023/04/17/walkable-neighborhoods-are-happy-neighborhoods-finds-study/?sh=652216c53f3a>

^v Endocrine Society, "Walkable neighborhoods can reduce prevalence of obesity, diabetes." <https://www.endocrine.org/news-and-advocacy/news-room/2022/walkable-neighborhoods-can-reduce-prevalence-of-obesity-diabetes>

^{vi} Bloomberg, "Kids Raised in Walkable Cities Earn More Money As Adults." <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-24/kids-from-walkable-cities-gain-economic-mobility>

^{vii} Strong Towns, "Why Walkable Streets are More Economically Productive." <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/1/16/why-walkable-streets-are-more-economically-productive>

^{viii} PubMed Central, "Everyday Walking Among Older Adults and the Neighborhood Built Environment: A Comparison Between Two Cities in North America." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7793713/>