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*Testimony of*

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*Before*

The Joint Select Committee on Housing

In Support of LD 2277

**Resolve, Authorizing the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services to Convey by Sale the Interests of the State in 3 Properties Located in Biddeford, Sanford and York**

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Select Committee on Housing, I am Erik Jorgensen Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 2277, “**Resolve, Authorizing the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services to Convey by Sale the Interests of the State in 3 Properties Located in Biddeford, Sanford and York**”.

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. We are an independent state authority (not a state agency) created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

LD 2277 is a bill that operationalizes a plan by the Judicial Branch to remove three surplus York County Courthouses from service. This need arose with the completion of the new consolidated judicial center, which has made the older courthouses in Biddeford, Sanford and York all redundant. The bill cites title 30-A section 4754-A, which provides a first

option for MaineHousing *or another housing authority* to purchase these buildings if they are to be used to create housing.

We understand that the public housing authorities in each of these communities have expressed interest in these court houses, and we applaud them. Directing these buildings to local affordable housing producers is always the best option. Public housing authorities are uniquely suited for this work, as they are public-purpose entities that are in the business of owning, rehabilitating and managing property. We at MaineHousing don't develop multifamily buildings ourselves, so our goal, in situations like this is always to call local PHA's when this sort of opportunity arises.

While these structures may no longer be needed as courts, our experience at MaineHousing has shown that repurposing sound older buildings can often be a cost effective way to produce new units. We have worked with local communities in the past all over the state to convert schools, mills, city halls and other structures into housing. This is work that requires a developer to think out of the box, but it can be a great way to preserve important buildings in a community and help assure that those buildings will continue to provide a public benefit.

These public housing authorities all have the track record and experience to assess and take on projects like these. They know these buildings and are probably the best judges in their communities about best to use them in order to help meet local housing needs.

Thank you.