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Maine's Rural Development Council

**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine  
in support of LD 659, An Act To Reduce Housing Costs By Not Requiring  
Fire Sprinkler Systems For Single-Family Homes And Duplexes**

March 6, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere and Honorable Members of the Joint Select  
Committee on Housing and Economic Development,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart  
Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping  
communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for  
comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

We partner with Build Maine to co-host a transparent crowd-sourcing of policy  
proposals that has drawn together over a hundred people from across Maine  
and beyond. Policy Action 2025 follows Policy Action 2023 from the 131st  
Legislature. Each session we strive to meet this goal, ***“to address barriers to  
and create incentives for equitable, sustainable growth and  
development that strengthens downtowns and villages of all sizes  
while pulling development pressure away from productive and  
open natural areas.”***

This testimony represents the position of GrowSmart and Build Maine.

As it pertains to LD 659, removing the requirement imposed by municipalities  
for single-family homes and duplexes to have fire sprinklers would eliminate a  
significant cost in the process of developing desperately needed housing in  
communities around the state. It's hard enough to build new affordable  
housing, and the additional expense of a sprinkler system can be the difference  
between a project happening or not.

We appreciate that the safety of Mainers is paramount and should rightfully be  
prioritized in the development of new homes. However, fire death data in  
Maine suggests that the presence of a functional smoke detection system has far  
greater impact on mitigating these events than sprinkler systems and at a  
fraction of the cost. The overwhelming majority of fire deaths since 2012 have  
been in houses that were built before 1980 – 1979 being the year when fire  
detectors started being required in new homes.

At a moment when high construction costs are already straining budgets for new builds, and in light of the soaring demand for new housing, we believe that this is a way forward. It's critical to lower barriers for building ADUs and smaller homes if the state is to meet its housing goals – and eliminating this sprinkler requirement would create more consistent, cost-effective, and predictable conditions for producing these types of housing in all communities.

GrowSmart Maine and Build Maine are willing to assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

Nancy Smith, CEO  
GrowSmart Maine

Kara Wilbur, Chair  
Build Maine