

Testimony of Robert Bryant, Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority District 2 Commissioner in support of LD 945 “An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Powers and Responsibilities of the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority” before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development.

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

My name is Bob Bryant and I’m pleased to testify today in support of LD 945, *An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Powers and Responsibilities of the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority*.

I was born and raised in Pittsfield, ME and graduated from Maine Central Institute in 1978. After college at St. Mike’s in VT, a stint in the US Navy, and with an MBA from Bryant University, I was fortunate enough to have a long career in Information Technology that took me to many places across the US and the world. However, I always came home to Maine. Over my career when I came back to the place that created my basis in life, I watched as vibrant and thriving communities I knew as a child fell into economic turmoil when companies that once supported Central and Northern Maine pulled their operations, while leaving behind manufacturing buildings they no longer wanted and the people they no longer needed. When I retired from IT, I moved back home with a goal of trying to help those communities.

I now live in Hartland, ME, one of those very communities whose manufacturing history and economic health was lost when Irving Tanning went bankrupt, the State took over the mortgage, and Tasman Tanning decided it no longer wanted to operate in Hartland despite significant tax breaks and vastly under market lease costs. Imagine my delight to hear of the establishment of the Land Bank by the Maine Legislature in 2022. I immediately submitted myself and my experience for consideration as the District 2 Commissioner. I was fortunate enough to gain both the Governor’s Appointment and the Senate’s Confirmation.

Since that time, I’ve been engaged with nine dedicated, enthusiastic, and highly experienced professionals, who along with our ex-officio members from various State of Maine agencies are focused on one thing: bringing abandoned and blighted buildings back to valued tax bearing properties for the communities and people of Maine.

We’ve done a lot of work and have positively impacted several communities already, but we’re just getting started. And as is common in initial creations of organizations through legislative action, there are areas in the original legislation that need clarification to ensure efficient and effective operation of the Land Bank.

First, the Land Bank needs explicit corporate powers so its operations and governance can be properly operated by the Commission.

Second, we need clarification that the Land Bank was created to take over both publicly and privately owned and even federal properties to ensure efficient transfer of real estate. Many municipalities don’t have the resources or the capabilities to take over blighted properties. And these properties can come from many sources. The legislature created the Land Bank to help municipalities by direct interaction with problem properties to bring them back to productive and tax-paying entities. Frankly, the tannery in

Hartland is one such property, and without the Land Bank's help and resources to affect changes to it, it will only continue to be a blight on the town, forestalling economic progress.

These items, while implicit in the original legislation, need to be clarified, which is what LD 945 will do for the Land Bank so we may expand the good work we're doing for the communities and people of Maine.

Thank you for your time today and your continued support for the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority.