



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony in Opposition to LD 870  
"An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission"  
March 20, 2025

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Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Elizabeth Caruso, and I represent House District 72, 9 towns and 20 townships and plantations of northern Somerset County.

While I reside in the organized town of Caratunk, where I have served as the First Selectman for 20 years, I walk into LUPC's jurisdiction every day. Caratunk is surrounded by plantations and unorganized townships, where my husband and I have made a living supporting our family as professional guides in those areas.

As one who has made a career out of helping people from away fall in love with these remote and beautiful places, I can sympathize with the view that Maine's unorganized townships' privately-owned landscape is of statewide value and interest. But as the representative for many plantations and unorganized townships, I fundamentally disagree with the premise of this bill – that rural communities lack the passion, vision, and expertise to best guide decisions which effectively plan for their future.

This bill would weaken home rule in Maine's vast UT by diluting the voice of residents and businesses in the unorganized territory by:

- Increasing the size of the commission to accommodate for 4 additional appointments made by the Governor.
- Removing the requirement that the Governor's appointees either reside, work or be a former resident of the commission's jurisdiction.
- Removing the requirement that the appointee be familiar with the "needs and issues affecting the commission's jurisdiction" and instead replace that with "persons with technical or scientific backgrounds."
- Removing expertise in "commerce and industry" from the potential criteria that county commissioners can select for.
- Reducing the number of days county commissioners must fill vacancies from 90 business days to just 30 (have you heard of any business that can fill a vacancy in 30 days lately?). It is also of note that if they fail to meet this threshold, the vacancy defaults to the Governor for appointment, and that the Governor is not bound to the same time limitations.

- It adds the requirement that the governor be notified of county appointees even though it is this committee and the Senate that confirm them.
- It sets a limit of two consecutive terms for appointments, which will restrict the ability of counties to select candidates of their choosing, especially because they have geographic limitations on who they can select while the Governor can select from a statewide pool of candidates.

Regardless of whether I look at these changes through the lens of a municipal official or a legislator, it is insulting. I can't imagine the Town of Caratunk being required to reserve positions in our town government for "experts" from away to have a seat at our table and a vote on decisions that directly impact the economic and environmental health of our local community.

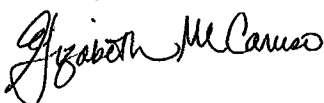
As a legislator, the premise is equally tough to justify. An equivalent would be for a number of seats to be held for lobbyists with "expertise" in specific fields to represent constituents and vote on the laws of our State.

We would never allow either scenario, because it would be wrong. Yet because unorganized townships and plantations lack a local municipal government, this bill seeks to give a seat at the table and a vote to special interests from away to determine local planning and zoning decisions.

**As lawmakers, we know firsthand that while many of us often lack specific training and backgrounds on specific issues, we put a lot of work into listening to experts who testify during public hearings, speaking with constituents, and doing independent research before arriving at decisions. The LUPC operates in a similar manner with guidance from public input, the DEP and staff that have background knowledge that is critical to the Commission's mission.**

Local decisions are best made by those who call the UT home. Diluting **the UT voice on the LUPC** would essentially disenfranchise my constituents. For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to vote 'ought not to pass' on LD 870.

Respectfully,



Elizabeth M. Caruso  
State Representative