



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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April 17, 2025

### *Testimony of Rep. Tiffany Roberts presenting*

## **LD 1226, An Act to Protect Consumers by Licensing Residential Building Contractors**

### *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development*

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the committee, my name is Tiffany Roberts, and I proudly represent House District 149, including the towns of North Berwick and South Berwick. I come before you today to present **LD 1226, An Act to Protect Consumers by Licensing Residential Building Contractors**.

I'll begin with a simple truth: When Mainers hire someone to build or renovate their home, their most valuable asset, and where they raise their families, they deserve to know that person is qualified, insured, and accountable under the law. And right now, in Maine, they do not have that assurance.

A person can sign a contract to build a \$500,000 house without meeting a single minimum standard. They need no credentials. No license. No insurance. No training. No track record. Meanwhile, the person installing the kitchen sink or wiring the lights must be licensed. The person laying the foundation? Not at all. That discrepancy is not just a gap in our policy—it's a gaping hole in consumer protection.

This bill proposes to change that by establishing a basic licensure framework for residential general contractors on projects over \$15,000 or involving multiple licensed professionals. It creates a Residential Construction Board housed within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, with representation from the industry and the public. That board will oversee license issuance, approve education standards, enforce compliance, and help ensure we regulate wisely, not bureaucratically.

The bill does not go into effect tomorrow. It provides nearly two full years to establish this new framework. That timeline is intentional. It allows for implementation planning, education and outreach, rulemaking, curriculum development, and system testing before a single license is required.

I understand that creating a regulatory system from scratch is not a small undertaking. But we are not starting from scratch in terms of knowledge or necessity. There have been at least seven attempts to license this profession in the last 20 years, and the Legislature has debated this issue off and on for more than four decades.

To emphasize how long the Legislature has been discussing the licensure of contractors, I want to include a quote from Bruce G. Doyle, the director of the Division of Licensing and Enforcement within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation in 1988. He was responding to a professor in the Civil Engineering Department of North Carolina State University.

“In the four years I’ve been with this Department, there has been various pieces of legislation to license contractors. To date it has been unsuccessful, usually due to lobbying efforts from the various building associations. Contractors are somewhat regulated on the local level by municipalities regarding building permits and local inspectors doing inspections based on locally adopted building ordinances and codes. I do feel its’ only a matter of time before legislation is successfully passed in this state.”

The time to study the problem has passed. The data is in. The harm is real. The system is broken. What we need now is action.

However, thoughtful implementation still matters. That’s why I am fully prepared to work with the committee to include unallocated language in this bill, authorizing a working group to advise and evaluate during implementation. That group can flag barriers, identify necessary legislative fixes, and report back to this committee with any updates or asks. It is a path forward that pairs accountability with adaptability.

Let’s look at the scale of the issue. Since 2020, the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division has received 3,246 complaints against home construction contractors. That’s just what rose to that level. Many hire lawyers or remain silent. In over 1,000 cases, the contractor never finished or even started the work. That is not just a statistic. That is thousands of Maine families out tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. That is thousands of jobs left half-done, homes left unlivable, and lives turned upside down. Again, this is only what we know and see.

In that same period, the state could only mediate 94 cases successfully. That’s a 2.9% resolution rate. The vast majority of victims are left with no remedy because the contractors disappear, ignore mediation, or lack the assets to pay damages. Meanwhile, those same bad actors are free to move on to their next victim.

This is not theoretical. This is happening in every single legislative district in Maine. The Attorney General (AG) has received complaints from over 370 municipalities. Whether you live in a rural town or a growing suburb doesn’t matter. There is no zip code immune to this.

And it’s not just the AG’s office that’s ringing the alarm. Investigative reporters documented dozens of cases across the state—families left in financial ruin with no recourse—because Maine is one of just six states in the country with no licensing or registration requirements for

residential contractors at either the state or municipal level. We are more of an outlier now than when I stood here last session.

Some may say this bill isn't enough. That it is narrow in scope in many ways. That other states' licensing is more comprehensive and multi-tiered. These are valid points. What I will say is that Maine has gone so far down the road of doing nothing that we have to turn back slowly to get to the other road of broader protections. This bill is meant not to touch your neighborhood handyman or the builders who are bordering commercial with a higher unit threshold. Responsible policy is incremental, and this bill is the start. It's the foundation to build on, much like the one our houses are built on. If it's done carefully and deliberately, then it can be built on from there.

Some will say this bill is too much, too fast. That we should keep waiting. But how much worse does it need to get? How many more complaints? How many more victims? How many more years of doing nothing before we finally admit that Maine's patchwork of contract law and consumer complaints is not working?

LD 1226 includes practical, intentional carve-outs to avoid overreach. It exempts work done on one's own home, emergency repairs, and licensed professionals already governed by their own boards, such as electricians, plumbers, and engineers. It does not impose education mandates on day-one applicants who can demonstrate existing experience. It does not require participation in union programs or one-size-fits-all coursework. It simply says: if you enter into a major residential contract, you should be qualified, insured, and accountable.

Licensing does not leave reputable contractors behind. In fact, it protects them. The worst thing for good contractors is to be undercut by fly-by-night operators who underbid, walk off jobs, and leave the mess for someone else to clean up. Licensing helps level the playing field for honest businesses. It promotes pride in the trade and builds public confidence in the profession.

Some argue that licensing will worsen the housing crisis by reducing the labor force. But that logic is backward. We cannot solve a housing shortage by lowering our standards and inviting bad actors to take advantage of desperate buyers. More homes do not mean better homes. And what good is a new subdivision if the homes are so poorly built that they become liabilities within a decade?

Others may raise legitimate equity concerns, such as small, rural, or minority contractors who fear that a regulatory burden will push them out. In my years in the Legislature and as a small business owner, I have seen firsthand how Maine consistently works to build support structures, grants, fee scaling, or technical assistance to ensure our businesses succeed. But again, the answer to inequity is not no standards. It is fair standards with equitable access to compliance.

We must also call out the elephant in the room. This issue has divided committees, chambers, and the Legislature as a whole for too long along partisan lines. That must end. It must end in the name of bipartisan policy. It must end for the people we serve.

Consumer protection is not just a Democratic or Republican priority. It is a Maine priority. When we look at the calls, letters, emails, and testimony we have received over the past four decades

on this issue, they do not come with a party affiliation. They come with pain, anger, and today with the question: How is this still allowed in 2025?

This Legislature has passed bold reforms to expand housing access. Now, we must take equally bold steps to protect the quality and safety of that housing. And when I say bold, I mean bipartisan, since we passed this bill last session, on party lines. The Mainers watching then are watching us now. Let's not let them down.

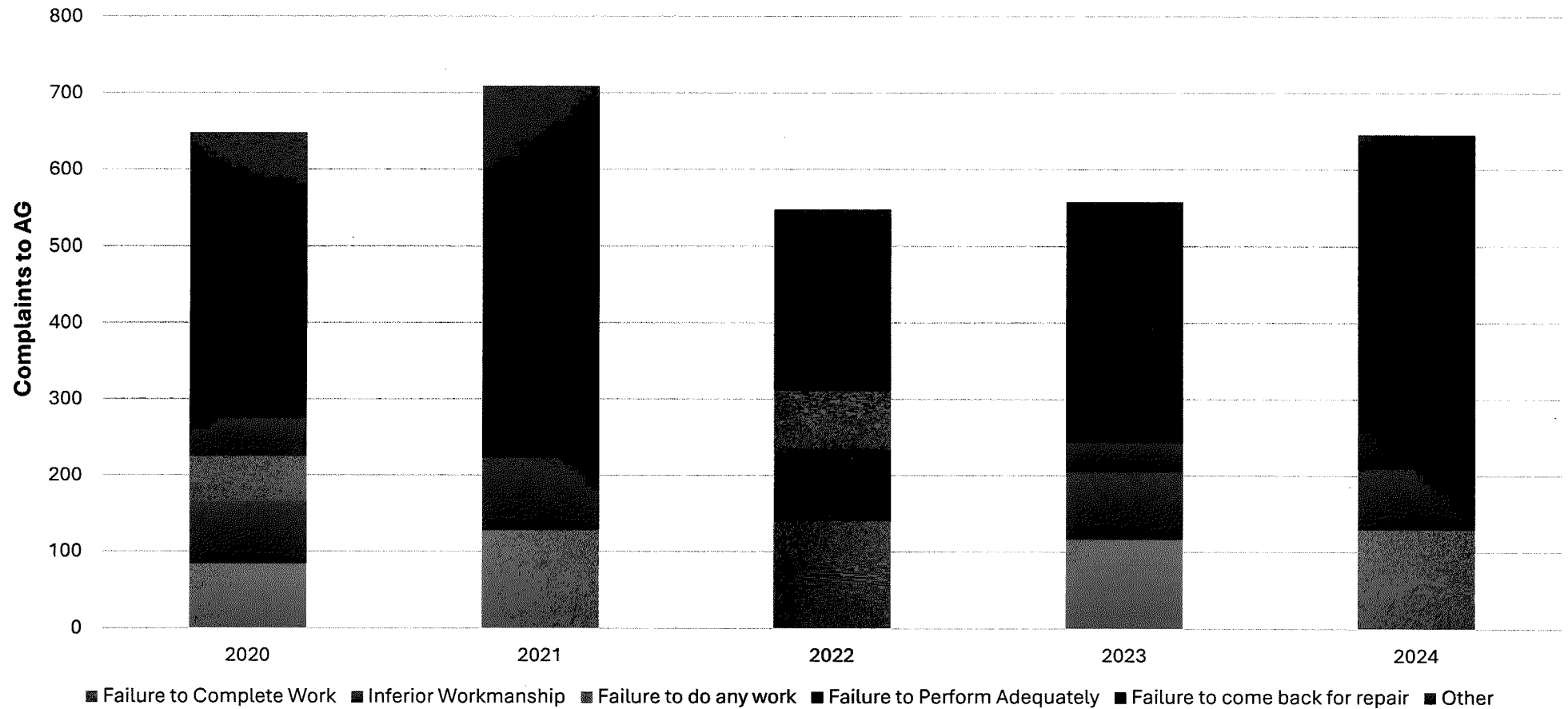
LD 1226 gives us a plan, a timeline, and the ability to finally say: in Maine, we expect better.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1226, with or without a working group amendment. Because the time for more studies is over. The time for standards has come.

Thank you. I would be honored to answer your questions and work with all of you on a successful and equitable path forward.

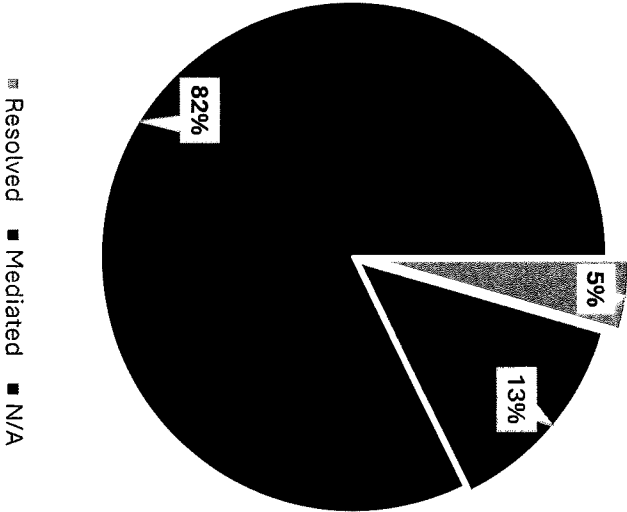
# Home Construction Complaints by Year

*(Attorney General's office only)*

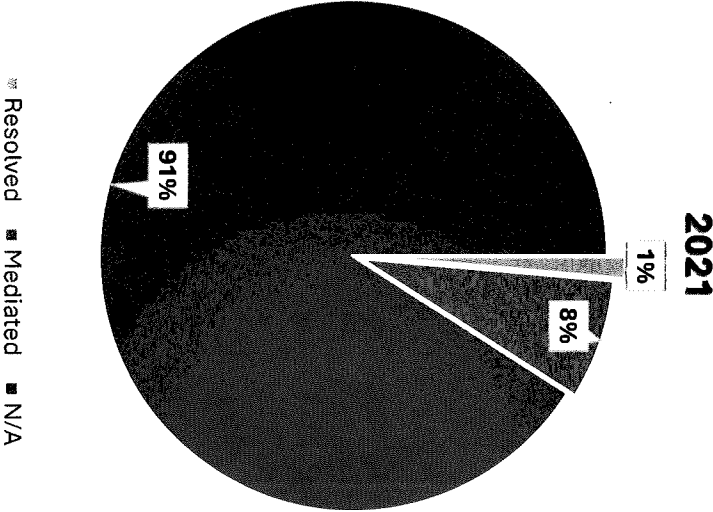


# Contractor Complaint Resolution by Year

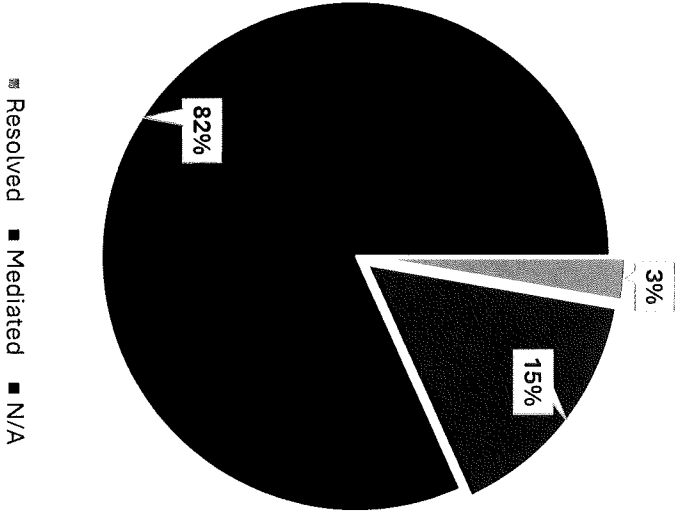
2020



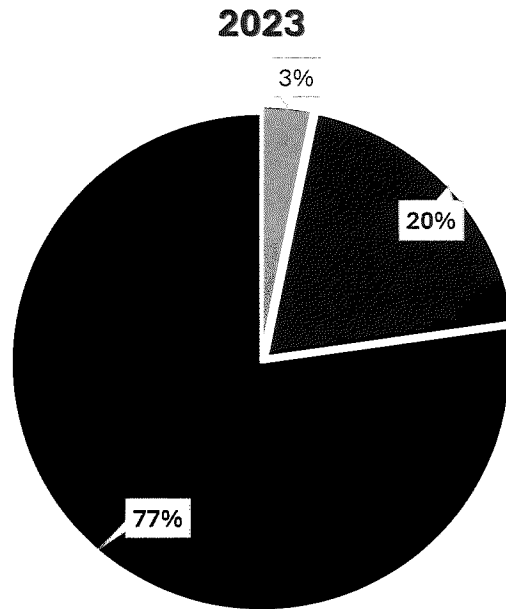
2021



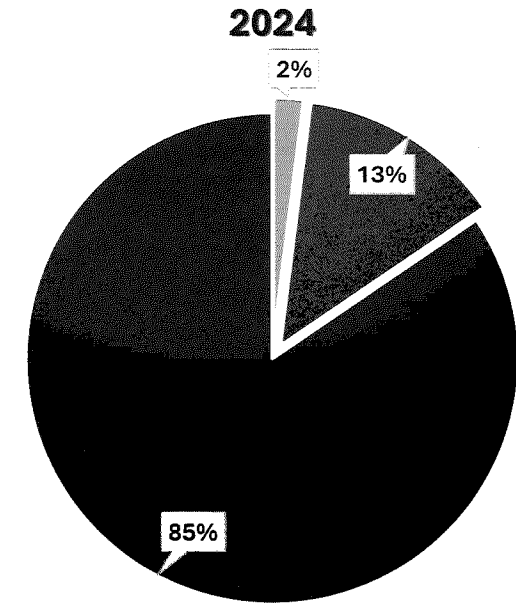
2022



## Contractor Complaint Resolution by Year



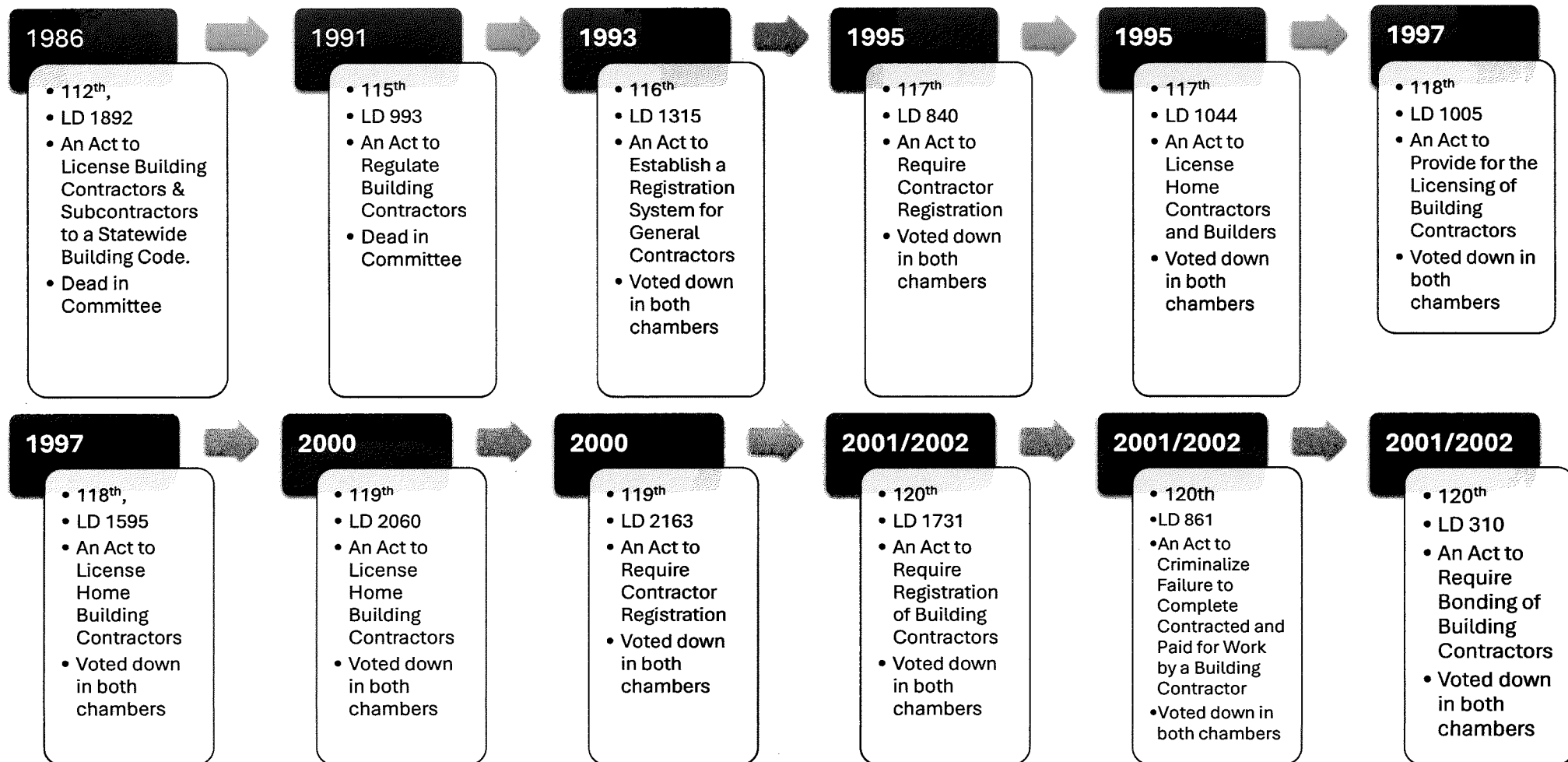
Resolved Mediated N/A



Resolved Mediated N/A

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Complaints	648	709	548	558	646
Mediated	115	64	100	127	100
Resolved	29	10	15	18	13
Restitution	\$55K	\$11	\$102K	\$53	\$43

# Legislative History of Home Contractors





# Legislative History of Home Contractors

2003/2004

- 121st
- LD 1551
- An Act to License Home Building and Improvement Contractors
- Voted down in both chambers

2005/2006

- 122nd
- LD 1306
- An Act To Authorize the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation To Develop a Model for Registration of Home Building and Improvement Contractors
- **Enacted**

2007/2008

- 123rd
- LD 1404
- Resolve, Directing the Establishment of a Building Contractor's License and Education Requirements for Code Enforcement Officers
- Died in Senate

2007/2008

- 123rd
- LD 1038
- An Act To License Home Building and Improvement Contractors
- **Licensing Act became Resolve to Study - Enacted**

2009/2010

- 124th
- LD 272
- An Act To License Home Building and Improvement Contractors
- Died between chambers

2011/2012

- 125<sup>th</sup>
- LD 188
- An Act To License Residential Builders and Register Specialty Contractors
- Voted down in both chambers

2012/2013

- 125<sup>th</sup>
- LD 188
- An Act To License Residential Builders and Register Specialty Contractors
- Voted down in both chambers

2021/2022

- 126<sup>th</sup>,
- LD 896
- Resolve, Directing the DPFR To Study a Voluntary Licensing System for General Contractors
- Dead in Committee

2021/2022

- 129<sup>th</sup>
- LD 397
- Resolve, Directing the Commissioner of DPFR To Conduct a Sunrise Review Regarding the Proposal To License Building Contractors...
- Dead in Committee

2022/2023

- 130<sup>th</sup>
- LD 1977
- An Act To Require Registration by General Contractors for Home Improvement and Construction
- Dead in Committee

2023/2024

- 131st
- LD 1929
- An Act to Protect Consumers by Licensing Home Building Contractors
- **Passed but not funded**

2024/2025

- 132nd
- LD 1226
- An Act to Protect Consumers by Licensing Residential Building Contractors
- **Public Hearing 4/17**