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*Testimony of Representative Grayson Lookner presenting*

**LD 1681, An Act to Consider Municipal Shelter Facilities and Housing Projects  
Essential for Public Health, Welfare and Safety by Updating the Definition of “Public  
Service Infrastructure”**

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

Good Morning, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and honorable colleagues on the Committee on Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Grayson Lookner, and I represent House district 113 which includes several neighborhoods in Portland. I’m here today to present **LD 1681, An Act to Consider Municipal Shelter Facilities and Housing Projects Essential for Public Health, Welfare and Safety by Updating the Definition of “Public Service Infrastructure.”**

This bill addresses a very specific but important gap in our housing financing system, and is designed to help towns and municipal housing authorities create and maintain housing for people who may fall through the cracks of existing state and federal housing programs, such as municipal employees.

I brought this bill forward after learning about multiple communities that wanted to create workforce housing or preserve affordable units using municipal bonds, but couldn’t get the necessary support through current channels. Just recently, Rockland took matters into their own hands by issuing a \$10 million bond for this purpose. That’s exactly the kind of initiative this bill would empower more communities to take – but with the crucial advantage of access to the Maine Municipal Bond Bank’s expertise and potentially better financing terms.

The need is clear all across Maine. The teachers who educate our children, the public-works employees who keep our water systems functioning and the firefighters and first responders who keep us safe – they’re increasingly being priced out of the communities they serve. While we have programs to support low-income housing development, we lack tools to help these essential workers who earn too much to qualify for traditional affordable housing but too little to afford market-rate housing in many communities. This has led to many towns being unable to

adequately staff departments and agencies that provide vital services on which their residents rely.

We've already seen some unfortunate missed opportunities. In Camden, a perfect opportunity to convert a historic school into teacher housing failed because no funding mechanism existed to support it. In Portland, the Housing Authority was asked to maintain public ownership of a development but lacked the bond expertise to make it work. These are exactly the situations where LD 1681 could have made the difference between housing being built or not.

This bill isn't about reinventing our housing system. It's a simple, targeted policy to recognize what we all know to be true: housing and emergency shelters should be considered just as essential to community health and stability as roads, water systems or public safety facilities. By including municipal housing projects in the definition of public service infrastructure, and allowing the Municipal Bond Bank to help finance some of these projects, we're giving towns one more practical tool to address their unique housing challenges.

I urge the committee's support for LD 1681. It's a commonsense solution that will help Maine communities keep their workforce living where they work. Thank you for your time and consideration.