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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Traci Gere Introducing LD 1921 An Act to Create a Statewide Housing Resolution Board May 12, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Curry and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. I am Representative Traci Gere, and I represent House District 134, which encompasses Kennebunkport and coastal Biddeford and Kennebunk. I am before you today to present LD 1921, which would establish a Housing Resolution Board within the judicial branch. The Housing Resolution Board would have concurrent jurisdiction with the Superior Court to hear appeals of final decisions by municipal reviewing authorities regarding housing and housing development. Decisions of the board may be appealed to the Supreme Judicial Court.

Maine communities are taking action to preserve and create more housing for Maine people, and here in this committee we have celebrated many of these successes. At the same time, many proposed housing developments are being cancelled or postponed due to disputes about whether the project was appropriately evaluated and approved. While every project is different, and it is not the purpose of this bill or this testimony to comment on the merits of any particular project, we have seen a number of instances when a developer has proposed a project designed to be in line with the community's vision and ordinances, but then some type of opposition emerges and the project ends up cancelled or mired in endless legal proceedings. This recurring scenario delays progress on communities' addressing their housing needs, adds a high cost burden to projects and developers, and has a chilling or distorting effect on future, much needed housing development.

This situation results from a lack of clarity and consistency in the process of planning for and approving housing development, as well as a lack of capacity and real estate development expertise in the judicial system, causing long delays in hearing and processing cases and appeals. As these cases drag on, the costs of development go higher and the waters around housing development get muddier.

Several states have taken action to create judicial panels or boards to focus on housing development, with the goal of providing a venue for appeals, moving disputes through the process more quickly and efficiently, and generating decisions and remedies that increase clarity and consistency for municipalities, community members, and developers.

LD 1921 is modeled on the Housing Appeals Board in New Hampshire that their legislature created in 2020 to help resolve housing development disputes. In addition to providing a specialized venue with expert decision-makers to adjudicate these cases, the New Hampshire board's decisions provide increased clarity and shared understanding of how housing development decisions will be made. They also create an incentive for municipalities and builders to reach better decisions at the local level.



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In an April article in the Concord Monitor, Ed Rogers, an engineer on the appeals board, said, "I've definitely noticed over the last four years, in local meetings that I've attended, a greater seriousness. Boards are really intent on taking cases more seriously, trying to make good decisions, because they know there is this alternative."

A Housing Resolution Board for Maine would provide the same benefit. Thank you for your consideration, and I ask for your support of LD 1921.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Traci Gere".

Traci Gere
State Representative