



# MAINE AFFORDABLE HOUSING COALITION

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## *Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development*

*Testimony of Laura Mitchell, Executive Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition,*

*in favor of LD1829 - Build Housing for Maine Families and Attract Workers to Maine Businesses by Amending the Laws Governing Municipal Land Use Decisions - by Speaker Fecteau*

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development. I am testifying in favor of LD1829 on behalf of our **140 member businesses and more than 2,000 individual members**.

**Housing is foundational to every goal we share as a state.** Whether we're working to strengthen our workforce, retain young people, increase tax bases, or revitalize downtowns, one essential solution rises to the top: more homes. Maine's HR&A Roadmap to Housing Production prioritized reducing barriers to housing. LD1829 does just that.

**Building any type of housing in Maine is extremely difficult and expensive. These costs and our home shortage are not isolated to one town or region. It is structural, systemic, and statewide. A statewide solution is needed. Media articles of local housing approval processes being swayed against people with "low-income", or false narratives about school populations, character, etc. run from Kittery, Cape Elizabeth and Cumberland to Kingfield, Bangor, and Greenville. The myths that decisions are made on are not legally binding, force reductions in units, and other changes that stop projects.**

With a Housing Resolution Board, LD 1829 helps ensure that when rules are set to support building more homes - those rules are implemented by trained volunteer planning boards. The Resolution Board is only utilized when a proposed project complies with law, but is being blocked or the community identifies it was approved wrongly. It's a tool of last resort, with expertise, speed, and transparency. **Maine communities will always shape their futures—but with the understanding that solving our shared housing challenge requires consistency and commitment at all levels of government.**

Maine's 2023 Housing Study identified that the solution is more housing—and fast. Maine is nowhere near the level of housing production called for in the State's 2024 Housing Goals report. We hear about barriers in every corner of the state:

- **In Belfast**, the local Habitat for Humanity was recently forced to scale back a planned affordable subdivision because the city's growth cap ordinance limited the number of units that could be built—despite strong community support and available infrastructure.
- **In Ellsworth**, city staff report that rising land costs—driven in part by large minimum lot sizes—are making it nearly impossible for teachers, health care, and hospitality staff to find housing.
- **In the Portland area**, over 1,200 affordable housing units that have been approved are stalled in predevelopment because of high costs, local review delays, or regulatory hurdles.
- **And in rural towns like Dover-Foxcroft**, developers are ready to build modest duplexes or cottage clusters—but have been blocked due to confusion over whether state density bonuses must be contained in a single building.

LD 1829 responds to these issues directly and constructively by:

- Providing a **14-foot affordable housing height bonus**. This aligns with project needs, such as ground-floor accessibility, and will make projects more feasible in towns with strict height limits.
- Clarifying **LD 2003** by allowing units be located in separate structures. This would allow a property owner in **Orono** to build a duplex and two small accessory dwelling units on a single lot—rather than cramming four units into a single building. That flexibility makes projects more financially viable and consistent with traditional neighborhood patterns.
- Prohibiting **residential growth caps** in designated growth areas—like the one in **Rockland**, which currently limits permits despite having clear planning goals and infrastructure to support development. These growth caps contradict smart planning and are barrier to needed homes.
- Setting a **statewide minimum lot size in growth areas**, helping reduce the per-unit cost of housing and recreating beloved, historic neighborhoods and villages across Maine.

Our state currently needs **80,000 new homes by 2030**. And more than **60% of Maine renters are already cost-burdened**. We cannot afford to delay or dilute efforts that make it easier to build. LD1829 sets us on a better path, please vote yes.