

Testimony of Patrick Woodcock
Before the Joint Standing Committees on Housing and Economic Development
Neither for Nor Against L.D. 916 “An Act to Promote Investment in Housing”
February 17, 2026

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Patrick Woodcock, and I am here on behalf of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, representing a network of more than 5,000 businesses across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on L.D. 916, “An Act to Promote Investment in Housing.”

The Chamber has long supported dedicating additional resources to housing development, particularly for middle-income households. Expanding housing supply is essential to Maine’s economic growth and to ensuring that workers can find homes near their jobs. We appreciate Representative Gere for bringing this legislation forward and for continuing the important conversation about how we address Maine’s housing shortage.

At the same time, given the scale of this challenge, we believe the most effective way to unlock middle-income housing is not only through additional funding, but by aligning incentives and addressing the regulatory barriers that often slow or prevent development at the pressure point – the local level.

As housing experts have testified before this Committee, the key to unlocking development is a clear, predictable regulatory framework and the reduction of unnecessary construction and permitting mandates. Because municipalities ultimately make many of the decisions that determine whether housing projects move forward, the State’s role should focus on establishing reasonable standards and creating incentives for reform.

There is a strong federal example worth considering. Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Housing for the 21st Century Act in a bipartisan vote of 390–9. The bill includes reforms familiar to this Committee: streamlining certain federal environmental reviews, promoting modular construction, enabling single-stair best practices, expanding HUD loan eligibility, and—most importantly—creating incentives for municipal housing reforms.

Specifically, Section 202 makes federal Community Development Block Grants—currently unavailable for housing development—eligible for housing purposes. Applicants must also report on municipal efforts to increase residential density, streamline permitting timelines, limit impact fees, offer density bonuses or tax abatements, and make vacant land available for development. In short, the legislation encourages municipalities to adopt housing-supportive best practices by requiring disclosure of those efforts as part of the grant process.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce proposes a similar, incentive-based model to unlock middle-income housing development here in Maine. We recommend designating the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation & the Future to establish clear best practices for municipal housing policy. Municipalities that adopt these practices would become eligible for targeted state grant funding and earn a designation as a "Municipal Housing Leader."

This approach rewards communities that reduce regulatory and cost barriers, encourages voluntary reform rather than imposing new mandates, and leverages limited state resources to generate the greatest possible number of new housing units per dollar invested. It is also consistent with Recommendation 2.3 of the HR&A report previously presented to this Committee.

Maine's workforce and economic competitiveness depend on our ability to produce more housing. By aligning state incentives with local reform, we can meaningfully expand middle-income housing supply and support long-term growth across our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.