

State of Maine
132nd Legislature
Housing and Economic Development Committee
Testimony in favor of LD2164

Dear Sen. Curry and Rep. Gere

My name is John Egan and I am the current elected chair of the Maine Redevelopment and Land Bank Authority Board of Commissioners and I am here to testify in favor of LD 2164.

The Land Bank, formed in 2023 by legislative action with an appointed board of commissioners, hired its first executive director in May of 2024. Since then, the Land Bank has engaged with communities around the state of Maine, rural and non-rural, communicating what this new entity is and could do for communities and also to directly engage on urgent specific projects like the former paper mill in E. Millinocket and recently, by purchasing the former tannery in Hartland. Both sites are on the path to becoming contributing assets to their local towns, as they once did. The purpose of the Land Bank is to serve the needs of its prime constituents – which are Maine’s municipalities and provide them with tools and resources to create economic growth and vitality. This bill provides a pathway and a toolbox to accomplish the very primary mission of the Land Bank which is to bring daylight, solutions, engagement, resources and PEOPLE in new purpose and mission for dark and/or abandoned, perhaps environmentally challenged real estate assets across Maine.

There are few historic assets in Maine towns that engender the emotions of the local community like an abandoned school. History lives there. Lives were formed there. Careers may have had their first start for many Mainers in the classrooms that now sit dark and empty. The challenge is not new, but the opportunity to breathe new life into these assets is immediate and the Land Bank is best suited to make this happen.

The LBA staff have already demonstrated pilot efforts toward this goal. Our best skill is listening to communities, mapping out the options and then helping achieve **their** goals. The board has a number of experts in its composition on how to assess, re-imagine a plan and then execute on that plan to restore economic vitality to our downtowns through these forgotten and perhaps eyesore locations. We know how to do this.

The bill describes two primary functions: providing technical advice and connectivity to data, resources and information to develop a plan; and then direct facility using our own team and hired professionals to carry out the plan. This will lead to more housing where it wants to be – close to town centers - and will demonstrate all the positive attributes of what

a re-purposed school can be. Keep in mind, this is not a novel idea. Maine has many examples of beautiful school buildings that are now housing families, seniors, special needs populations and the workforce of those communities in which they live.

I encourage you to empower the Land Bank Authority to demonstrate what it can do to deliver these types of projects and serve Maine's towns and their residents.

Thanks for your good work on solving so many of the issues related to housing facing our state.