



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Traci Gere Introducing LD 2164, An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing February 10, 2026

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 2164, which establishes the Vacant School Housing Conversion Program within the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority. The program will provide technical and financial assistance to municipalities seeking to redevelop vacant school buildings into residential housing, including units dedicated as affordable housing. The bill also establishes the Maine School Conversion Fund, which will be used to support the development of vacant school buildings.

Converting vacant schools into housing is a common sense approach to creating affordable and attainable housing in many communities. Kennebunk is a great example, where years ago three former school buildings were converted into affordable apartments that have provided much-needed affordable housing for decades.

For communities looking to create needed housing in the current economic environment, vacant schools offer important benefits. They are often well-located with infrastructure connections and easy access by road, and they occupy a warm place in community members' hearts as a place where they and/or their children and grandchildren spent happy times learning and growing with friends.

That said, some vacant schools are easier to redevelop than others. At times, due to structural issues, size, site/location, and internal configuration, and despite valiant local efforts, vacant school redevelopment projects don't prove financially feasible, so they hit a wall, leaving communities with few options for moving forward. Especially for small municipalities with limited resources, the complexities and the hurdles can prove daunting and can prevent good projects from happening.

Over the past two years, the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority has been meeting with communities all over the state to understand their needs and challenges, especially around economic development and housing. The Land Bank has the tools and expertise to help communities overcome the hurdles of vacant school redevelopment, including navigating complex environmental, regulatory, and financial requirements and facilitating negotiations and packaging of projects to improve the feasibility of conversions.

The Land Bank has the authority to take title to property to move projects forward. It is important to note that the Land Bank will engage in this work only with express agreement of a municipality,



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with a memorandum of understanding with the municipality being required as a condition of participation.

LD 2164 also establishes a fund to support vacant school redevelopment by assisting with planning, design, engineering studies, hazardous material abatement, support in navigating affordable housing programs, and capital investment to leverage other funding.

There are a number of people testifying today on LD 2164 who have been working with Maine communities, along with dedicated community members working hard to move toward a future vision for their own communities. I sponsored this bill on their behalf, and I enthusiastically support their work on vacant school redevelopment. As many Maine communities are in the process of making important decisions on next steps for these publicly owned assets, this bill is timely and important.

Thank you for your consideration, and I ask you to support LD 2164.

Respectfully,

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

Traci Gere
State Representative