



**LEGAL SERVICES
FOR MAINE ELDERS**

February 10, 2026

**Testimony of Marge Kilkelly for Legal Services for Maine Elders
Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development**

In support of 2164 An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am here today on behalf of Legal Services for Maine Elders. LSE provides free legal help statewide for Mainers aged 60 and older when their basic human needs are at stake. Our clients are generally low-income, some with medically complex conditions. The majority of our work focusses on housing issues.

I am speaking today in strong support of LD 2164 An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing

Schools are the heart of the community. As school consolidation has moved students to other communities and as student populations have decreased school buildings are empty. At the same time housing availability is a critical issue.

LD 2164 seeks to create opportunities for those vacant schools to be converted to housing with a percentage available for affordable housing. This is desperately needed by older Mainers. It is estimated that 20% of people 50 and over lack retirement savings and there is a 3 to 5 year waitlist for affordable housing. (Megan Walton SMAAA Maine Biz July 23, 2025)

Older Mainers want to age in place. Many want to stay in their own home, but if and when that becomes impossible the next best option is to stay in their communities. The community they built with their work, volunteerism and family. Being in your community means being near a place of worship, family, friends, healthcare, familiar shopping and social groups. Socially engaged older people often experience better physical health, increased mobility, and a stronger sense of purpose and belonging.

Converting vacant school buildings into housing serves to retain the culture and heritage of a community, often reduces opposition to the project and reduces waste compared to demolition. Additionally, multi-generational communities create interactions between older and younger members which reduces ageism, increases communication and encourages understanding across generations.

LD 2164 addresses the needs of the community to utilize buildings, residents need for safe, affordable housing, and supporting the creation of vibrant diverse communities.

We urge the passage of LD 2164.

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