

19 February 2026,

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the joint standing committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the joint standing committee of Housing and Economic Development. My name is Bella Sturtevant, I'm a student at Thomas College and a resident of Leeds. I'm also a Rural Youth Organizer with JustME for JustUS, a youth-led and rural-led nonprofit ensuring young people in rural Maine have their voices heard throughout our state about the issues impacting the places they live and their local communities.

As a young person from rural Maine, I support this bill because it will help young people and families build a future here. We can't afford to do that with rising housing costs—even working full time in entry-level jobs—where median home prices have doubled to over \$400,000 while wages lag far behind. Maine needs 80,000 homes by 2030, but we're moving only half as fast as required, with just 4,800 homes being built a year when we need 8,500-9,300 per year. Young Mainers are leaving in droves—nearly half from Down East—because starter homes and rentals are out of reach, which is projected to shrink our 20-39 year old population to 3.3% by 2032, consequently gutting the workforce. This bill's housing push lasts generations, filling jobs and stabilizing our economy before it's too late.

For all of these reasons, I urge you to please support the investments in housing included within the budget proposal. Your decisions today will impact my future. Thank you!