

Testimony of the Maine Office of Community Affairs
Director Samantha Horn

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

**LD 445, An Act to Stimulate Housing Production by Increasing the Threshold Before
Participation in the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Is Mandatory**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the joint standing committee on Housing and Economic Development; my name is Samantha Horn, Director of the Maine Office of Community Affairs. I am submitting written testimony to provide information related to LD 445, An Act to Stimulate Housing Production by Increasing the Threshold Before Participation in the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Is Mandatory.

The Maine Office of Community Affairs, or MOCA, was created in 2024 to foster communication and partnerships between the State and communities in this State. Our charge is to engage with municipalities, tribal governments and regional councils to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance and financial support to better plan for challenges, pursue solutions and create stronger, more resilient communities. The Governor's biennial budget proposal moves the Building Codes and Standards program to MOCA.

My testimony today focuses on the steps that MOCA will take to better support small communities in implementing building and energy codes. Representatives from other departments will testify on other aspects of the bill.

We recognize there is a chronic shortage of code enforcement officers in Maine, particularly in rural communities. This leaves local officials in a bind when trying to provide timely service to homeowners and building professionals. The current job market is part of the challenge in recruiting CEOs, but we believe more can be done at the state level and we are taking steps today to improve the situation.

The Administration has put together a multi-agency team to support the State Building Official. Our short-term goals are to increase the number and geographic distribution of training opportunities, extend training to building professionals such as contractors and architects, and to update the resources on the website so the information is easier to access. We are also seeking grant funding to experiment with a regional "circuit rider" approach to hire code enforcement experts for technical assistance to communities. If the Building Codes and Standards program is moved to MOCA, there is a natural opportunity to integrate this service with other technical assistance to communities.

In addition to enhanced training, we recognize the need for recruiting and mentoring new CEOs. Once we have training in place for the immediate 2021 code rollout, the Administration team will work with code and building professionals to create a support system for new code professionals. By creating a robust system of recruitment, training, and mentorship, we can improve the availability and quality of code services, particularly in rural communities.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and to provide information for the work session.