

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

To the members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee,

I have worked as a Code Enforcement officer for multiple Maine Cities and Towns. I have worked as a builder, designer and draftsman designing homes all over the world. I have been a building materials contractor salesperson. I have managed jobs small and large and have been in Code enforcement since the early 2000's.

The code is in effect statewide and has required local enforcement in cities and towns of over 4000, while it is not mandated to inspect or enforce the code if a population is below 4000. While this may not be the clearest and most efficient way of wording this, it also leaves builders open to lawsuit for non-compliant work if the owner wishes to go to court. For this reason and pride in their work, most good builders will follow the code everywhere.

The MUBEC is the **STATEWIDE** building code and is to be self-enforced in towns of less than 4000 (which has not been happening in many places), unless enforcement has been opted in. Is it being proposed that contractors in any town of less than 10,000 ignore the code and build subpar structures in an attempt to save costs? Do we care that people will be living in less safe less efficient housing and are paying more or the same amount? The cost of land, labor, and materials is the issue not the building code. The code is a **Minimum standard code**. If a home was constructed to just the bare minimum code was graded like a school test, then the home built following the strict requirements of the code would get a C. Most homes constructed are built beyond the code in many aspects as It is usually the largest and most long term debt a person will ever have. The result is a better, more energy-efficient home gaining the long term benefits of lower maintenance and reduced energy costs.

It is an unfair assumption and a typical knee jerk reaction that it is more costly to build to the minimum code standards, and that reducing compliance will save money. If this is true, then eliminate codes and enforcement then all our housing issues go away. What will happen is you will have more low-grade housing with a shorter life span that costs more to own and maintain in the long term.

Basic economics tells us that the market costs of goods lead to increased prices that in turn leads to the need of increased wages and benefits, which in turn causes increased costs in labor and services... etc. The effect of codes is not an economic hinderance if you look at the long-term savings over the life of the structure. All codes and enforcement do is improve the quality of housing.

All this does is make development poorer quality not cheaper. It takes away City and Town abilities to regulate development according to their Comprehensive Plans (as formerly mandated) and the wishes of their occupants. This type of legislation makes it hard to attract new people to code enforcement, as we constantly must fight for tools to just do our jobs and keep people safe while fighting to keep the same tools it took years to get.

I believe legislators need to get out of Augusta and travel with a code officer, fire fighter, and police to see the crap we see out there. I have seen people living in uninsulated sheds with electricity supplied by extension cords strung through snow and water, and the only heat is a improperly installed wood stove, an unvented fuel fired heater, or an electric heater.

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I have seen wood stoves installed in campers that are used as a primary dwelling even though they are not designed for this type of use. We see people living in houses without floors, solid windows, working doors. I have seen these structures burn and loss of pets, possessions, and even occupant lives. And the senseless loss pains me as I know that enforcement could have avoided the loss if Maine would adopt the International Property Maintenance Code as some of the Municipalities I have had the pleasure of working in have done. Then promote having code officials work with DHHS, Community Action Partners and even private groups to get these people into safe places. Only then can we move the needle without endangering our residents. We need more not less code professionals working, and we need more tools and help from additional entities to create more safe housing.

If we repeal code enforcement or reduce it, we might as well allow anything such as cardboard houses with wood stoves and unvented heaters, campers heated with torpedo heaters, sheds with outhouses or just 5 gal. buckets with pool noodles, and anything else to be used as shelter.

More housing is not the answer if it is unsafe and unsustainable.

We as a society need to work to identify and address the issues of housing while not sacrificing health and safety to create a feel good solution that only makes matters worse in other ways.

Do not pass bad legislation in the name of cost savings if there is potential danger to the public. If you want the wild west where anything goes, just repeal all codes and laws and start adding lots of first responders as we will need them.

Thank you.