



To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

From: Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG)

Re: Support for LD 2164 – Vacant School Housing Conversion Program

Date: February 6, 2026

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of KVCOG, we write in strong support of LD 2164, *An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing*.

As an organization that works closely with municipalities in Kennebec, Somerset and Western Waldo Counties, we regularly see the challenges communities face when school buildings are closed and transferred to municipal ownership. Former schools are often centrally located, structurally durable, and valued community assets. Yet they also present significant hurdles, including high upfront costs, environmental concerns, regulatory complexity and limited local capacity to evaluate and advance reuse.

After reviewing the current language, we believe LD 2164 responds directly to these realities. It establishes a practical, voluntary framework that enables municipalities to partner with Maine Redevelopment to access technical assistance, coordinated project support, and targeted funding to evaluate and advance housing reuse. The dedicated funding included in this bill is essential to making reuse feasible. Without upfront resources for feasibility analysis, environmental assessment, and site preparation, many former school buildings remain vacant for years. This leads to continued deterioration, increased municipal carrying costs, and lost opportunities to address local housing needs. The funding proposed in LD 2164 is targeted to specifically remove these barriers so properties can be positioned for redevelopment rather than becoming long-term liabilities. Removing these early phase capital expenditures to determine a site's potential for reuse empowers municipalities to market their properties more effectively and reduce the risk to future private investments. Maine and our Kennebec Valley region is facing a well-documented housing shortage that affects communities of all sizes. Meeting the State's goal of creating 80,000 new housing units will require a mix of new construction and the reuse of existing public assets. Former school buildings represent one of the most practical and near-term opportunities to contribute to housing supply while reducing long-term municipal burden.

Smaller and rural communities make up the great majority of our region all have limited staff capacity, so the complexity of environmental, financial, and regulatory requirements can stall projects indefinitely. LD 2164 fills a critical gap by pairing coordinated expertise through a trusted statewide partner with capital support, without shifting new mandates or responsibilities onto municipalities. As a Regional Council we can work on these projects but believe partnering with Maine Development is the most effective way to improve outcomes going forward. We have a excellent working relationship with Maine Redevelopment and this bill if passed will enable more productive collaboration.

We believe this approach will meaningfully support our communities, help unlock housing opportunities, and align state investment with municipal capacity. For these reasons, KVCOG



urges the Legislature to support LD 2164, and we thank the Representative Gere and committee for advancing a thoughtful, community-driven solution to vacant public buildings and Maine's housing shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Greenwood".

Joel Greenwood

Executive Director, KVCOG