



To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
From: Town of Union
Re: Support for LD 2164 – An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing
Date: February 9, 2026

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

On behalf of the Town of Union, we write in support of LD 2164, An Act to Assist Communities with Converting Vacant School Buildings into Housing.

Like many Maine municipalities, Union has inherited a former school building(s) following closure and transfer through the school consolidation process. These buildings are centrally located, structurally durable, and deeply valued by our community. At the same time, they present significant challenges related to cost, complexity, environmental concerns, and limited local capacity to evaluate and pursue viable reuse.

LD 2164 recognizes the realities municipalities face. It provides a practical, voluntary framework that allows communities to partner with Maine Redevelopment to receive early technical assistance, project coordination, and access to targeted funds to evaluate and advance housing reuse when it aligns with local priorities.

The dedicated funding included in this bill is essential to making reuse feasible. Without upfront resources for feasibility analysis, environmental assessment, and site preparation, most former school buildings remain vacant, leading to continued deterioration, rising municipal carrying costs, and missed housing opportunities. The funding proposed in LD 2164 is targeted to remove these early barriers so properties can be responsibly positioned for redevelopment rather than remaining long-term liabilities.

Maine is facing a well-documented housing shortage that affects communities of all sizes. Meeting statewide housing needs 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 add housing while reducing long-term municipal burden.

For smaller communities particularly, the challenges of navigating regulatory requirements, environmental conditions, and developer interest can stall projects for years. LD 2164 fills a critical

gap by providing coordinated expertise and a trusted statewide partner, rather than shifting new mandates or responsibilities onto municipalities.

We believe this approach will help unlock housing opportunities across Maine while respecting the financial and administrative limits of local governments. For communities like ours, LD 2164 offers a realistic path forward where few currently exist.

For these reasons, the Town of Union urges the Legislature to support LD 2164 and thanks the sponsor and committee for advancing a thoughtful, community-driven solution to two pressing challenges: vacant public buildings and Maine's housing shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Todd Souza

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