

Joint Standing Committee on Housing & Economic Development
Testimony of Caroline Bas, Advocate, The Coalition for Elevator Reform
In Favor of LD 2224, An Act to Reduce Certain Costs Associated with Residential
Construction
March 5, 2026

Good morning, Chair Curry, Chair Gere, and members of the Committee,

My name is Caroline Bas, and I am an advocate for The Coalition for Elevator Reform. We are an emerging group of disability, senior, and housing advocates aligned around the shared goal of bringing down the cost of elevators. I am here today in strong support of LD 2224, and specifically to speak to the provisions that will, if enacted, increase the prevalence of elevators across Maine.

Building code reform is gaining traction across the country as states recognize that outdated requirements are driving up the cost of housing without a corresponding safety benefit. LD 2224 takes a targeted, evidence-based approach to that problem. Paired with zoning reforms, it will enable access to newer, accessible housing in our existing communities.

We believe LD 2224 should encompass additional topics for cutting the red tape discussed by the Work Group last fall. These include:

1. Allowing up to 6 stories of single-stair residential construction
2. Expanding municipal subdivision review thresholds from 3 lots to up to 5 lots
3. Increasing the residential sprinkler threshold from 3 units to 5 units
4. Prohibiting municipal requirements for sprinklers in single-family housing
5. Adding a MUBEC board member with affordable housing experience to ensure cost impacts of code decisions are fully considered
6. Allowing smaller, readily available elevators in buildings up to 3 stories where elevators are not otherwise required

Why the Elevator Provision Matters

I want to focus my testimony on item 6, because I believe it carries some of the greatest potential impact and is not yet fully understood.

Current building codes have no requirement to install elevators in small multifamily buildings. The buildings this provision targets are likely to not have elevators at all. The question before the committee is not large elevator versus small elevator. It is accessible, gently-density homes in our existing neighborhoods versus more walk-ups.

Elevators are not luxury amenities. They are essential infrastructure for accessible, inclusive housing. They enable access for seniors who want to age in place, for people with disabilities, for parents navigating a building with a stroller, for anyone carrying groceries or recovering from an injury. The absence of an elevator does not just inconvenience some residents. It excludes them.

The reason developers leave elevators out of smaller multi-family buildings is the cost. Research by the Center for Building in North America documents that elevators cost 3 to 5 times more in

the United States than in comparable European countries. That disparity is not explained by labor costs or construction complexity. It is driven by building code requirements that mandate oversized equipment and larger shaft dimensions, even in low-rise buildings where a smaller, residential-grade elevator would fully meet safety needs.

Smaller, purpose-built elevators are in widespread use in Europe. They are safe, reliable, and well-established. Allowing smaller elevators in buildings up to three stories does not lower safety standards. It right-sizes the requirement to the building. And in doing so, it makes accessible housing financially viable at the right scale for many communities across Maine.

My Experience as a Developer

For the previous six years I worked as a nonprofit affordable housing developer focusing on disability-inclusive housing. I wanted to build accessible housing in 20-unit buildings, a scale that some of our residents preferred over larger communities. But in project after project, the cost of an elevator broke the pro forma. Those projects never got built.

That experience led me to research by the Center for Building in North America on why elevator costs in the United States are so much higher than in Europe. The answer is not that American workers are less skilled or that our buildings are uniquely complex. It is that our codes require equipment sized beyond what the safety case actually demands, particularly in smaller, lower-rise buildings. That is a policy problem, and it has a policy solution.

LD 2224 is a pragmatic, technically sound bill, and the elevator provision is not a narrow technical fix. It is a meaningful step toward ensuring that as Maine builds more housing, that housing is actually accessible to the people who need it. I urge the Committee to support it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Caroline Bas

Advocate, The Coalition for Elevator Reform