



Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Housing
in support
LD 724, An Act to Expand Workforce Housing in Rural Maine by Funding the Maine State Housing
Authority's Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program

4/14/23

Amy Winston, Senior Director, State Policy

Dear Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Winston, and I am Senior Director, State Policy, for Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI). I live in Edgecomb. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of CEI, to express our organization's support for LD 724, *An Act to Expand Workforce Housing in Rural Maine by Funding the Maine State Housing Authority's Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program*.

CEI is a non-profit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) based in Brunswick. CEI works to build a just, vibrant, and climate resilient future for people in communities in Maine and other rural regions. We do this by integrating finance, business expertise and policy solutions in ways that make the economy more equitable. Since 1977, CEI has worked to increase access to affordable housing and homeownership. As an economic development organization, CEI has long understood the necessity of stable, affordable housing as an economic lifeline for individuals, families, and communities. Laura Buxbaum, CEI's SVP of Public Policy and Resource Development, has spent decades as an advocate and expert in the field of affordable housing. She is a Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) commissioner.

As part of the Maine Jobs and Recovery Act, in an effort to offer solutions to the current affordable housing crisis, which disproportionately impacts low and moderate income Maine households, and to compensate for the lack of federal resources that are directed at rental housing in rural areas, MaineHousing created the Rural Affordable Rental Program to facilitate the development of affordable workforce rental housing in areas and at a size and scale where traditional Low Income Housing Tax Credit projects are not feasible. LD 724 extends this program to incentivize investment in the acquisition and adaptive re-use of existing buildings, the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing non-rent restricted housing, and the construction of new buildings with units that will remain affordable for decades.

The Recovery Act-funded program was quickly oversubscribed, so it is clear that there is strong demand for these funds. Many private developers of smaller projects do not have the capacity to effectively use the LIHTC program, which is best suited for larger developments in more densely populated areas. And yet there is a great need for housing that is affordable for seniors and working families - and at the appropriate scale - in our smaller towns and rural areas.

CEI strongly supports this investment in critical infrastructure that is needed to grow Maine's workforce and economy, especially in rural areas where signature industries and heritage-based pursuits such as



sustainable farming, fishing, and forestry are our state's enduring assets and competitive economic advantage. For communities to be sustainable and thriving, they must be economically and socially diverse with equitable access to affordable housing.

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of LD 724. We encourage the committee to vote in support of this bill to invest in Maine's economy by investing in workforce housing.