

April 25, 2023

Testimony for LD #1706 & #1593 regarding PL2021 C 672

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on Housing

FROM: Amanda Campbell – Town Administrator, Town of Georgetown and Member, Maine Municipal Association Legislative Policy Committee – gtwnme@hotmail.com

RE: Proposed amendments to the Affordable Housing Act (LD 2003, now law)

As the current Town Administrator in Georgetown and Maine Municipal Association LPC member, I submit this testimony with significant concerns regarding the passage and implementation of PL2021 CH672 and with strong opposition to LD#1706 and LD#1593.

As proposed, the new language of both bills would significantly undermine Home Rule, a tenet of local Maine government. Municipalities have long held that their residents and local officials know what is best for their specific community. This concept is no different regarding affordable housing and the possible ways to implement programs that may increase availability. However, reducing minimum lot sizes, changing dimensional requirements, contradicting subdivision law and removing local approval in the building process in no way increases the availability of affordable housing. In a community like Georgetown, those types of changes would not only be detrimental to the desire to maintain the rural character of our community, which was deemed important by residents during the creation of our 2021 Comprehensive Plan, the changes would also significantly impact our island infrastructure. Seasonal, island communities are not served by public water or sewer. Our ledge covered island can only accommodate so many private septic systems and although Georgetown is one of the most compliant Towns to accommodate licensed overboard discharge systems, the Department of Environmental Protection will not issue new licenses and Georgetown encourages residents, whenever possible, to replace their OBD system with a traditional septic system as is required by law. Holding tanks within the shoreland zone create their own problems and are only used as a last resort option. Removing waste disposal requirements, with no accountability for increased disposal but not increased system capabilities will encourage septic intrusion into private wells and potentially into the coastal waters where our local fishermen make their living. In addition, the local water table is already compromised during the summer when our population triples and the recent two years of summer drought have proven that our aquifer cannot support additional need.

As a member of the MMA Legislative Policy Committee, it is my job, with others, to debate the merits of bills that will have direct impacts on the municipality I serve as Town Administrator. During discussions last year surrounding LD2003, the Maine Municipal Association was portrayed by members of the legislative bodies as opposing affordable housing. Nothing could be farther from the truth and it should be remembered that the MMA advocates who are testifying at hearings are speaking FOR representatives from the municipalities of Maine. Their voices are representing ours. And our voices, as municipal officials, are representing our residents, the voters.

There is no doubt that affordable housing is of great concern in the State of Maine, in communities of all sizes. What I do doubt, is the ability of the law, as written, to make any impact on the availability of affordable housing, in communities of all sizes, and specifically in Georgetown.

It is discouraging, at best, to continue to provide concrete and documented concerns regarding not only the implementation of PL2021 C672, but also the consistently poor amendments that do nothing to further affordable housing in the State of Maine and to continue to not be heard.

I strongly urge the members to consider LD1706 and LD1593 as significant overreach to Home Rule and encourage members to move forward with the affordable housing law in a manner that allows municipalities to become part of the discussion and not the recipients of a to-do list from a bill that was poorly constructed and not feasible to implement given the limited tools and timeline.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony and would be pleased to speak with any committee member who may have questions.