



Committee on Housing  
% Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

January 5, 2023

**RE: LD 1134, An Act to Improve Housing Affordability by Amending the Definition of "Subdivision" Under the Site Location of Development Laws**

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

My name is Francesca "Ches" Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Policy Advocate. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to "conserve Maine's wildlife and wildlife habitat" by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 1134, *An Act to Improve Housing Affordability by Amending the Definition of "Subdivision" Under the Site Location of Development Laws*.

LD 1134 reduces permitting time and substantially increases the threshold for the definition of a "subdivision" – both in acreage and number of units – thus disqualifying a large subset of subdivisions from the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) long-standing and effective Site Location of Development Act (Site Law) review. Site Law review is critical to avoiding and minimizing negative environmental impacts from large-scale developments, such as subdivisions. This bill would diminish the DEP's ability to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of many new housing projects by fueling unchecked and hasty development – potentially resulting in irreparable harm to delicate ecosystems, water quality, and wildlife habitats, and potentially placing new homeowners or businesses at risk of wet basements, contaminated soils and well water, or degradation of nearby streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes, thus diminishing property values. The change could also both facilitate and encourage subdivisions to be built in valuable farmlands and forest lands that form the backbone of the rural economy and will be critical to our future ability to reduce climate impacts and provide locally-grown food and wood products. This is counter to efforts to encourage more dense housing in growth areas, as is being proposed under several other bills being heard before this committee. A robust Site Law review process is essential for striking that delicate balance between accommodating the need for housing and safeguarding Maine's unique and diverse environment.

Thoughtful development takes careful planning and coordinated efforts on the part of the state, towns, and community members. Growth and conservation can coexist – *and they must* – but

we have to be smart about it. As Maine grapples with a lack of housing and a growing population, the importance of judicious land use planning where we strive to balance the needs of both human and wildlife communities is paramount. We must not hamstring the DEP – a crucial guardian of the state’s natural resources – from the very evaluative work they were designed to do.

Respectfully, we urge you to oppose LD 1134. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum", written over a thin horizontal line.

Francesca “Ches” Gundrum | Policy Advocate