



Natural Resources Council of Maine
3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine • 04330 • www.nrcm.org

**Testimony in Support of LD 1694,
An Act To Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority
May 13, 2021**

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, I am Pete Didisheim, the Advocacy Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1694.

NRCM is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, established in 1959, that advocates for protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. We have more than 25,000 members and supporters.

We support LD 1694 because it will help prevent sprawl, clean up brownfields, invest in communities, and advance the state's climate goals. NRCM works to protect wildlife habitat and advocate for conservation of land and waters to prevent misplaced, expansive development. We monitor development proposals in the Unorganized Territories to prevent far-flung development in favor of growth near existing service centers, to help protect the viability of existing businesses.

A land bank, as proposed in LD 1694, would focus resources on blighted, abandoned, and environmentally hazardous properties and buildings. The goals of the bill align with NRCM's work to prevent sprawl and support investment within municipal boundaries to help strengthen Maine communities. It creates a program and funding mechanism to allow municipalities to invest in existing properties and buildings, thereby helping discourage the conversion of natural and working lands into development. Habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation are leading causes of species decline. Those drivers can in part be addressed through a land bank that incentivizes the repurposing of existing buildings rather than new construction on the edge of town, further encroaching on or displacing wildlife habitat.

We also support LD 1694 for its climate benefits. Many abandoned, blighted, and environmentally hazardous properties contain stored carbon in the form of refrigerants, heating oil, and building materials. Cleaning up and repurposing these spaces prevents unintended emissions and ensures that development happens on the built environment rather than on natural and working lands that provide essential carbon sequestration and storage. Also, more compact towns and villages that are walkable and bikeable reduce vehicle miles traveled by residents, which is a leading source of carbon and other pollutants.

LD 1694 has many other positive benefits, such as helping facilitate the remediation of contaminated sites that are environmental and human health hazards as well as revitalizing rural communities and economies that are in need of investment.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1694. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. Please let me know if you have any questions.