

130th Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on
Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
Testimony of Erik C. Jorgensen, MaineHousing,
in support of

LD 1694: An Act to Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority

13 May 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and esteemed members of the IDEA Committee: my name is Erik Jorgensen, Director of Government Relations at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing).

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. MaineHousing is an independent state authority created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs, including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs as well as a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

I am writing today in support of Representative Sachs' bill to create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority. MaineHousing believes that this could be a useful tool to help clear title and facilitate redevelopment of distressed properties in Maine. It's an approach that has been successfully used in 18 different states, and we think it could become a similarly important resource here. We are confident that this could help developers produce new affordable housing (as well as other beneficial development) in locations that have hitherto been difficult to take advantage of. We are heartened to see that this proposal has been developed carefully, over time, by a group of municipal and state officials with deep expertise in the subject.

We see this bill as part of a suite of measures being considered by this legislature, each of which has the potential to solve specific problems around Maine's housing shortage and barriers to land redevelopment. Along with speaker Fecteau's bill to examine obstacles to development in zoning codes, representative Morales' bill to facilitate the reuse of abandoned properties, and Senator Deschambault's efforts around making the TIF law more amenable to affordable housing, LD 1694 represents another potential tool for municipalities seeking to solve difficult land use challenges. Will it revolutionize land redevelopment in Maine? That's unlikely. But with each new tool available our state will make incremental progress.

This bill encompasses many of the principles that characterize smart, environmentally sensitive growth. It's been said that the greenest buildings are those that you don't need to build. When you can combine that type of redevelopment while also meeting community needs and reducing blight, it's a triple win. We hope you will support LD 1694.

Thank you.