



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters

In Support of LD 1694

An Act To Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority

Before the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Committee

May 17, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Committee:

My name is Kathleen Meil, Director of Policy and Partnerships for Maine Conservation Voters. MCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization that represents more than 8500 members and supporters dedicated to protecting Maine's environment and our democracy. We support policies that keep Maine on a path to meet statutory climate goals, enhance community resilience, and achieve an equitable clean energy future. Today that means supporting LD 1694 and the creation of the Maine Development Land Bank Authority.

Land banks have many tools and powers to support investment in our existing built environment, enhancing community resilience and reducing the climate impacts of neglected, inefficient buildings. Maine is home to some of the oldest building stock in the country, much of which does not meet the functional or building performance needs of the 21st century. In areas with impaired economic value, years of neglect may have further eroded building safety and performance, making the structures unattractive to the private market. By separating ownership of *land* and *buildings*, community land banks can restore, remediate, and improve abandoned homes; sell the newly safe and energy efficient structures; and lease the underlying land. In addition to dramatically reducing the purchase price, ensuring that home ownership is in reach for lower income Mainers, this structure focuses resources and community efforts on extending the life and enhancing the performance of our existing buildings.

As co-chair of the Maine Climate Council's Buildings, Infrastructure, and Housing Working Group, I am painfully aware that heating, cooling, and lighting of buildings are responsible for almost one-third of Maine's greenhouse gas emissions -- and that reducing emissions from the building sector is essential to meeting our climate targets. Weatherization offers a cost-effective path to reducing emissions and saving home and business owners money on their utility bills by improving insulation and reducing air leakage. Rehabilitating aging or abandoned buildings to meet modern needs, including commercial space and affordable housing in downtown centers,

offers the added benefit of preserving the “embodied carbon” already sequestered in building materials and alleviating the need for new construction.

Maine has successfully implemented weatherization programs to improve the energy efficiency of approximately 20,000 market-rate homes since 2010, and many thousands more through the low-income programs of Maine Housing and the Community Action Programs. There is more work to do, however, and the new Climate Action Plan calls for doubling the current pace of weatherization so that at least 17,500 additional homes and businesses are weatherized by 2025, and at least 35,000 by 2030. Meeting these weatherization targets will require every tool in our tool box -- and LD 1694 would provide a powerful new tool in the form of community land banks.

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.