



**Testimony of the Island Institute in Neither for Nor Against of LD 2003, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions
March 7th, 2022**

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Nick Battista, and I am offering this testimony on behalf of the Island Institute neither for nor against LD 2003.

The Island Institute is a 39-year-old nonprofit organization based in Rockland, Maine. We work to sustain Maine's island and coastal communities and are committed to a just, resilient, and vibrant future for the coast of Maine. We work in partnership with courageous leaders to support resilient communities and confront a changing world.

We greatly appreciate the work of the Commission and this Committee to identify ways to alleviate various aspects of the housing crisis in communities across the State. We see housing as a structural issue that can inhibit the building of community resilience in the communities where we work. This is an important conversation to have, and while the Island Institute is testifying neither for nor against LD 2003, we do want to highlight 2 considerations.

75% of Maine's coastal communities have fewer than 3,500 people, and 25% of coastal communities have fewer than 800 people. A strong majority of these communities do not have a municipal planner on staff, and many do not have access to effective regional planning support. This means many Maine communities have very limited capacity to review and adjust zoning laws to respond to a specific issue, even one as important as housing.

While we appreciate the funding to support technical assistance for communities, the funds provided in this legislation will only reach a small number of Maine communities. Given the level of funding and expectation in the bill for a multi-year process, we are concerned about whether Maine's smallest communities will be able to receive the support they need to understand the proposed changes to land use laws and implement them.

At the same time, some communities are taking meaningful action on their own. Vinalhaven recently undertook a needs assessment better to identify the various housing challenges present in their community. Chebeague has had a series of conversations this winter about the connection between housing and the future of the community. Cliff Island recently secured dedicated housing to ensure the teacher in their one-room school house would be able to live on the island. We would encourage you to recognize that these are largely volunteer efforts where people who care deeply about the future of their community are actively working to make it better and help make their work easier. Thank you for your work on this important issue.