



Maine People's Alliance

Good morning, Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and honorable members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Cate Blackford and I am the Public Policy Director for the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

MPA strongly supports efforts to increase opportunities for housing by updating our land use and zoning regulations. The changes in this bill set a new standard for how we approach housing in every community, understanding that we must all be part of solving our housing crisis. By having the state update how it guides zoning, it creates opportunities to move beyond the local status quo.

MPA was impressed by how thorough and thoughtful the commission to increase housing opportunities was in its work this past fall. As you all know well, there are many ways in which zoning is used to prevent the housing we need from being developed. Maine is facing a housing crisis with terrible, tangible consequences for people every day, whether it's living one paycheck from eviction because rents are so unaffordable, not being able to find a place to live even if you could afford the rent and having to leave the community you love and change your children's schools, or falling into homelessness.

These recommendations would lay a foundation for greater density, more housing diversity and a shared responsibility statewide. They would also provide resources and support for the implementation of these changes. We are especially in strong support of the recommendations to eliminate single family zoning, to eliminate growth caps, to strengthen fair housing laws and to create the right to add an accessory dwelling unit (ADU).

When communities lack a diversity of housing types, people can't live near where they work, schools become segregated by class and people are forced to leave communities that they love.¹ Duplexes, triplexes and accessory dwelling units blend in seamlessly. Apartments and condos in villages and downtowns bring in more customers for local businesses.² Artificial growth caps and other forms of exclusionary zoning drive up prices by creating false scarcity. This makes it harder not only for apartment hunters and first time home-buyers but also for

¹<https://www.brookings.edu/essay/trend-1-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods-are-sustaining-racial-and-economic-injustice-in-the-us/>

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-12-01/the-best-smart-growth-projects-in-america>

people who want to trade up or downsize. Even when you have housing, you get stuck.³ And if you don't have housing, you're forced to leave, or worse, fall into homelessness.⁴

Our current fair housing laws have loopholes that make it easy for people to resist change, even when that change would help us all. Just look at what happened in Cape Elizabeth this past year.⁵ Eliminating terms like character and overcrowding as reasons for exclusionary zoning open up possibilities for more diversity of housing.

Maine, like most places, is in the midst of a housing crisis. We're expecting to see some of the highest home price inflation rates in the country this year.⁶ We also need to attract more people, especially young people, to grow our workforce.

With housing prices this high, it's easy to feel like we have nothing to share with "people from away" - people who are coming and people we need. LD 2003 will help address our false scarcity and set us on a path to a future with greater opportunities, regardless of your income level and where you have close ties.

To create greater shared prosperity, and stronger communities, we need a multifaceted solution. This spring, we have a broad housing agenda to capitalize on the energy and momentum in Maine for addressing our housing crisis. I urge you to support this bill with the caveat I shared and the other bills this session that would significantly increase the supply of housing overall and affordable housing in particular. (LD 1673, LD 484 and LD 1961)

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to take any questions.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Nh9e1JgZM>

⁴ <https://bangordailynews.com/2021/07/26/news/the-pandemic-made-maines-affordable-housing-problem-worse/>

⁵ <https://bangordailynews.com/2021/11/30/news/portland/affordable-housing-project-in-cape-elizabeth-can-celed-by-developers/>

⁶ <https://www.mainebiz.biz/article/portland-area-home-prices-expected-to-increase-faster-than-any-in-the-u-s-next-year#:~:text=Realtor.com%20also%20predicts%20that,line%20with%20recent%20statewide%20tr ends.>