



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters

In Support 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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

March 7, 2022

Good morning Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and members of the committee. My name is Abigail Bradford and I am the outreach manager for Maine Conservation Voters. Today, I am testifying in support 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.

MCV is a statewide organization that represents more than 13,000 members and supporters. We are dedicated to protecting Maine's environment and our democracy by making conservation, climate, equity, and voting rights political priorities. We believe that all people deserve access to safe, affordable homes close to jobs, schools, and services. Others today will speak more to that human right and to the many ways in which LD 2003 will benefit Maine and address the problems we are facing. I will focus on how this bill will help Maine address and prepare for the climate crisis.

First, by increasing the amount of affordable housing in the state, LD 2003 will help address the workforce shortages that are preventing Maine from carrying out our climate action plan — Maine Won't Wait — at the pace needed. Maine needs more trained, skilled workers to weatherize our homes and make them more energy efficient; to install heat pumps and EV charging stations; to install and maintain solar panels and wind turbines; to build walking paths and bike lanes that reduce our reliance on cars; to construct the infrastructure projects that will address flooding and sea level rise; and so much more. We also need more farmers to increase Maine's food security and more loggers to keep Maine's forest products industry healthy to supply sustainable materials - including newer innovations such as wood fiber

insulation and structural composite lumber. Our communities need enough affordable homes to house the young Mainers interested in those trades and to attract qualified workers from elsewhere.

Second, LD 2003 encourages compact, mixed-use development that will lessen Maine's impact on the environment and make our communities, our food system, and our economy more resilient to climate change. Communities across the country are struggling to redesign sprawling land use patterns to address severe housing and workforce shortages, to lessen debilitating traffic, to meet their needs for green spaces and agriculture, and more. Maine is relatively undeveloped, and we have the unique opportunity to get that development right as our population grows.

I like to picture sustainable, healthy communities from a bird's eye view. From above, one would see a compact community surrounded by forest that everyone can use and farmland that can feed the whole community. Because everyone can get where they need to go on foot, bicycle, or bus, there isn't the need for so many parking spots and garages, which currently take up about one-third of the land area in U.S. cities. This will free up space for homes, businesses, community gathering spaces, tree lined streets, and rooftop gardens. Communities designed this way would solve more problems than I have time to list. Transportation is by far Maine's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions and is also a large source of pollution that makes us sick. Owning a car is an immense financial burden for low-income Mainers and isn't an option for many Mainers with disabilities and for Maine's large and growing aging population. Green infrastructure will help manage stormwater, clean our air and help lessen the impacts of high heat days that will intensify with climate change. Conserving farm and forest land will help us meet our needs more sustainably today and more resiliently in the future. Having tighter-knit communities will help us address the epidemics of loneliness and sedentary lifestyles.

And that leads to my last point: **Having adequate housing for Maine's growing population will make our communities more resilient to the unpredictable societal impacts of climate change.**

I think many of us feel a deep need for community. I'm 29 years old, I've lived in Maine my whole life, I have old friends and a big family — and I'm lonely. That's because they all live two and a half hours away and opportunities to meet people in my town don't present themselves everyday. I get in my car by myself to go everywhere. There aren't community gathering spaces and events that many people go to, especially people my age. I want friends and neighbors that I see everyday as I walk to work or ride the bus to the farmers market. I want Friday dances in the town square. I don't want to have to own a car; I could use that money to make a down payment on a home, to travel or to plant a garden. I want to be able to eat food that I know was grown in ways that nourish the soil rather than strip it and that was grown by my neighbors, helping to

support their families. I want everyone in my community, regardless of how they make an income, to be able to live close to their job in a nice home.

LD 2003 will help make that vision a reality for Maine communities by encouraging compact development. It will allow up to four dwelling units, such as two duplexes, where we now only allow single family homes. It will enable all homeowners to construct an accessory dwelling unit, such as an in-law apartment, to house a loved one or to rent. It will prohibit ordinances that cap the number of building or development permits each year. It will require our towns and cities to allow affordable housing to be built at certain densities and to ensure that they remain affordable for at least 30 years. It will offer grants and technical assistance to towns and cities to update their zoning and land use ordinances to foster more affordable housing. It will require municipalities to designate a priority development zone located near community resources, where multifamily housing can be built more compactly. And it will make all of this housing development non-discriminatory by amending the fair housing provisions of the Maine Human Rights Act so no Maine government entity can use outdated terms or relics of redlining to restrict the construction or development of housing.

In closing, increasing affordable housing and compact development are key pillars to addressing and preparing for the climate crisis. Maine Conservation Voters strongly supports this bill and urges you to vote “ought to pass.” Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to you and I am happy to answer any questions.