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Statement by Kerry Casey
Citizen of Mount Vernon, ME

To Members of the Labor and Housing Committee

Regarding L.D. 2003, "An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions"

March 7, 2022

Sen. Daughtry, Rep. Sylvester, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to give testimony to you today. I'm Kerry Casey, citizen of Mount Vernon, ME.

I oppose L.D. 2003, "An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions."

I have lived in Maine for 40+ years. I've lived in rural towns and mega-cities prior. In 1982, I jumped at the chance to move to Maine, purchasing an older home, and 100+ acres of land. I was HOME, having lived in many cities, but always wanting the chance to get back to the land. MAINE – THE WAY LIFE SHOULD BE. Although I appreciate the pressure and urgency to address affordable housing, I am convinced that we are verging on destroying that saying and wanting to make our beautiful state just another suburb of Boston. This proposal may be appropriate for Portland, and some of our cities. However, it is totally inappropriate for our rural towns and state-wide mandates.

I am a farmer, do accounting work for many organizations, and am active in my community. I've served on rescue, planning board, appeals board, and school board, in Mount Vernon and am currently involved in our town's aging-in-place committee. Our town, as all other small rural towns, have worked diligently to balance growing needs, what we want the town to be, agriculture and ecological impact.

- Our 2020 Mount Vernon population census is 1,721. The addition of 20 housing units, 2 adults/2 children (rough average looking over census family and household statistics – this is on the low side) would be a 5% increase in our population. Small rural towns usually have a volunteer rescue and fire service, and pretty much volunteer social services. A 5% increase yearly, within a year or two would break our municipal services completely. We do not have the infrastructure to support large increases. Nor do we have public transportation, sewer, hospitals, doctors, dentists, large grocery stores, uber eats or 24-hours convenience stores. It needs to be a conscious choice to live in a rural town – not just because there is affordable housing. There are no other services. Period. Rural towns are NOT the place for anyone/everyone, and along with their charm and perks, they do not offer everything a city has. That is what makes a rural town RURAL.

- Our school (2020-21) enrollment is 228, so 20 additional housing units (per above) would be an additional 40 students or an 18% increase. Education is our largest budget item and in 2020-21 our education assessment was \$3,103,049 or \$13,610/child. 20 units would increase our education portion of the budget by 18% or an additional \$544,585 per year. Small rural communities' largest (if not ONLY) source of revenue is real estate taxes. In our case, the first year would be a 13.57 % increase in everyone's property tax for 20 units, 40 student increase. (Note: realized increase property tax revenue on 20 NEW \$100,000 units would support 2.4 additional children – NOT 40. It is a fact that real estate tax revenue growth does NOT cover the increased educational cost).
- The largest pressure from this kind of property tax increase would drive out our older population, and remaining farms. Then, the change in character of the town by increased density and loss of agricultural use and open land would drive out our seasonal owners.
- This does not even begin to address the other aspects of things dependent on population, and supported by real estate taxes. There is the transfer station (another large line item), road/traffic use, municipal town hall services increased pressure (tax collector/town clerk).
- Increases in population of a small rural town are not avoidable, but need come about in controlled, sustainable ways, not by wiping out existing ordinances and restrictions.

This is a bad idea to over step the planning and regulations that rural towns have, and an insult to the people that have worked continuously updating and reevaluating them (and then voting on them). This would destroy our way of life and what makes Maine a place people CONSCIOUSLY choose to call rural Maine home and would be an economic disaster. The portion of LD 2003 that disallows consideration of "character of location" is the death knell for rural Maine. The end result of LD 2003 would most likely be destroying rural towns, decimating the tourist and seasonal industry and, in my opinion, destroying Maine as we know it.