

Testimony of the Greater Portland Council of Governments in Support of Portions 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 7, 2022

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Labor & Housing Committee I am Kristina Egan, Executive Director of the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG). I am here today to speak in support of portions 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.*

I want to begin by thanking the members of the *Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions* for their hard work and bold recommendations. We are happy to see their final report reflects the urgency we all feel around creating more housing for more people across Maine.

While our member municipalities do not agree with every proposal made by the Commission, we are hopeful this Committee will use many of the Commission's recommendations to shape state policies that have support across the entire state, and across all levels of government, so we can get to work creating the housing that people need, and can afford.

GPCOG serves twenty-five municipal members, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, and the County of Cumberland. We staff the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization which allocates over \$25 million dollars annually in federal transportation funds to regional priority highway and public transportation projects, extending our service territory into York County, including Saco and Biddeford.

GPCOG also serves as the Portland region's Economic Development District, as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, and we support numerous programs like Maine Clean Communities and the Maine Broadband Coalition, along with the ever-changing needs of our member communities.

Like the rest of the state, our region is suffering from a housing crisis. Working families, retirees, young people, and everyone with low-to-moderate income are struggling to find housing they can afford in the places they want to live.

Last fall I had the pleasure of testifying before the Commission and made four recommendations. I'd like to share their substance with you:

1. Create a goal and a clear definition of success for municipalities. While much of the housing market is outside local control, local land use policies can be changed to better support expanded housing. By creating a state goal for housing production, local governments can focus on successfully advancing

local land use policies that result in new housing creation that advances the state goal. LD 2003 should be amended to add a state new housing production goal. Without one, success will be much more difficult to achieve.

2. Create a framework for municipal action that includes a menu of land use policy options all centered on expanding housing choices. Give municipalities several options for local action, recognizing that one policy cannot fit all the different urban, suburban, and rural needs of our region, or the state.
3. Provide strong and continuing funding for municipal technical assistance so local efforts to improve housing choice are supported by state, regional, and consulting experts. Land use policy changes are complex undertakings that most of our members cannot successfully complete without adequate support. Make adequate funding a prerequisite for any municipal requirements.
4. Provide new revenue opportunities for municipalities that successfully complete housing expansion land use reforms. As an aspect of considering new revenues, explore adding preferential scoring (or similar treatment) for municipalities that successfully take action to encourage housing expansion when the state is awarding economic, transportation, and sustainability programs.

GPCOG supports the parts of LD 2003 that respond to these recommendations.

The bill's provisions that establish funding for municipal technical assistance, implementation grants, and financial incentives based on successful changes to local housing policies are all welcome proposals that we fully support. We were pleased to see that LD 2003 reflects the recommendations for funding technical assistance to municipalities through multiple channels that we made to the Commission last fall, and we thank the sponsors for including them in LD 2003 (see Appendix O of the final Commission report).

LD 2003's density bonus provisions in Section 9 are a step in the right direction that we also support. However, we believe the proposal should be strengthened by ensuring that the location of dense development is aligned with infrastructure capacity and local growth plans. Where housing is built matters just as much as expanding the housing supply.

Changes to the Maine Fair Housing Act proposed in LD 2003 are welcome, and we support them wholeheartedly.

Finally, LD 2003 advances the concept of Priority Development Zones, something we agree is a valuable tool for every municipality. As drafted, the bill requires every municipality to submit a PDZ ordinance to the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development two years after DECD finalizes rules for the PDZ program.

PDZ's need to work quickly and efficiently to accelerate housing growth, similar in some ways to the process the Committee has crafted in LD 1694, *An Act To Create the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority*. From our perspective PDZ's will work best when they can align with a state housing goal, and focus on the

municipalities where housing can best be supported and welcomed. We urge adoption of PDZ's without the mandate, and with the flexibility needed to implement them successfully and quickly.

LD 2003 contains several provisions that conflict with local control. Our members, like most municipalities and Maine Municipal Association, do not support those parts of the bill.

But I would like to conclude by emphasizing that LD 2003 has many good ideas that can make a real difference in Maine's housing crisis. Speaker Fecteau and Senator Hickman have our thanks and gratitude for their work on the Commission, and on this legislation. GPCOG urges this Committee to amend LD 2003 so it can swiftly become law and begin working to increase housing construction throughout Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and please let me know if GPCOG can help you with your important work on LD 2003.