

## In Support of LD 2003

I am writing to urge this committee's support of LD 2003 and share my perspective. A bit about my background. My name is Nathaniel Ferguson. I grew up in Limerick and attended MSSM and Colby College for my secondary and post-secondary education. I am twenty-two years old and recently graduated from Colby with a degree in Mathematics and Statistics. I now live and work as a data analyst in Portland; I love Maine and want to raise my future children in this beautiful state. I have an interest in housing policy and have seen firsthand the effects of our current policy choices on both myself and others in my generation.

For many my age, housing represents a significant cost and homeownership is a far-off dream. I know young adults that continue to live with their parents well beyond when they would like, recent graduates from Maine colleges who want to stay in their adoptive home state but struggle to find an affordable housing option, and others who delay starting a family because they are unable to afford enough space.

These anecdotal examples are backed up by statewide data. According to data from the Maine Housing Authority, 55% of Maine households were unable to afford a median 2-bedroom apartment in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Vacancy rates are plummeting (with a 19% decrease in vacant homes for rent from 2014 to 2019, and a 16% decrease in vacant homes for sale in the same period),<sup>2</sup> which drives up housing costs as renters and buyers compete on price. New construction has also slowed considerably: only 27,026 housing units were built from 2010 to 2019, while 96,460

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mainehousing.org/policy-research/housing-data/affordability-indexes>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mainehousing.org/policy-research/housing-data>

units were built from 2000 to 2009.<sup>3</sup> This aging housing supply is simply not enough to house all the people living in, being born in, and moving to Maine.

There are three key proposals in LD 2003 that address this issue: the prohibition of municipal growth caps, allowing by-right construction of up to 4 units on areas zoned for any residential housing, and allowing construction of accessory dwelling units. Each of these reforms will allow additional new, high-quality, sorely needed housing to be added to the market, putting downward pressure on rents and purchase prices.

Critics will argue that prohibiting municipalities from imposing strict controls on new construction is a bad idea, and that these reforms should happen on the local level, if at all. They will urge caution and that we wait until a perfect solution is found. It is easy to ask for “additional review” or undue caution when you do not feel the pinch of a crushing housing market directly. But further delay and half-measures will only exacerbate the situation further. Housing prices will continue to rise, and fewer Mainers will be able to live and work where they wish. Incumbent homeowners might say that this is a price they are willing to have others pay. They might not care that the restrictions on housing growth in areas with jobs forces prospective residents to live further from where they work, spend more money and time commuting, and requires more investment from the state and municipalities into expensive, unnecessarily sprawling infrastructure. However, unaffordable housing affects incumbent residents too. For current homeowners in desirable areas, they see businesses raise their prices or close up shop as there are fewer workers nearby to staff those businesses, and they see their community price out the young families and working-class people that are sorely needed to support the economy throughout Maine.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mainehousing.org/policy-research/housing-data>

Of special interest is the effect of LD 2003 on home prices. Many oppose development in their communities on the basis that new development would lower their home's value. This point in particular underscores the importance of implementing these reforms statewide. Even if these proposals reduce some individual home prices (or, more likely, slow the growth in prices), it would be through a statewide reduction in the cost of housing, which benefits all residents by ensuring higher quality housing is available at a lower price. A piecewise reform cannot deliver this broad-based benefit and leaving these reforms up to municipalities runs the risk of incumbent homeowners reaping the rewards of more housing development while shouldering none of the responsibility.

Another dimension to consider is the bill's environmental impact. Newer homes are more energy efficient, sustainable, and safer.<sup>4</sup> If more new housing is allowed to be built closer to population centers, the environmental benefits of newer homes is compounded by the reduction in commuting distance. Moving 10 miles closer to work reduces the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from a typical worker's commute by over 4500 pounds per year.<sup>5</sup> In addition, less time spent driving to work allows workers to do other, more valuable things with their time. Allowing additional housing to be built close to where it is needed can only lead to a greener, cleaner, and happier Maine.

Because of the broad benefits these reforms will bring, and the enormous economic and environmental good they achieve, I urge the committee to give LD 2003 an Ought-to-pass report.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/stop-fetishizing-old-homes-new-construction-nice/621012/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle#driving>