



Maine Real Estate &
Development Association

Supporting Responsible Development

Testimony in Support

LD 2003, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and Honorable Members of the Labor and Housing Committee;

My name is Josh Fifield and I am the pleased to be before you as the President of the Board of Directors for the Maine Real Estate and Development Association (MEREDA) in support of LD 2003, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions.

MEREDA is a statewide, membership-based organization founded in 1985, whose members include real estate owners, for-profit and non-profit developers, architects, engineers, bankers, property managers and other related professionals. The mission of MEREDA is to support responsible development and real estate ownership throughout Maine. Through the work of its Public Policy Committee, MEREDA pursues a more fair, practical, and predictable policy environment. MEREDA is the state's only trade association supporting responsible commercial real estate development and the positive economic growth that accompanies it.

We know we don't have enough housing in our state, but we don't really know the scale of the impact that has had on our ability to grow and invite new Mainers. We do know that the acute shortage of inventory is a major problem cited for businesses in recruiting new talent to our state. As Maine looks to chart a stable economic path out of the pandemic and through the coming climate change

MEREDA would like to thank the Housing Commission (the Commission) members and members of the legislative drafting team for their hard work on preparing LD 2003. MEREDA believes it closely mirrors the recommendations brought forth by the Commission. As this Committee deliberates the merits of LD 2003, we would encourage you to give due deference and consideration to the Commission's hard work. As experts in their fields, their recommendations represent real world solutions to the problems housing developers are facing, and the barriers that exist to housing creation.

LD 2003 would help level the playing field for housing development across the State by implementing certain uniform land use provisions, including allowing multi-family dwelling in all neighborhoods zoned for residential use, expanding the permissiveness of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), and providing financial and technical assistance to municipalities to modernize their land use codes. By mandating certain land use provisions, LD 2003 would increase uniformity across towns and regions. When rules are uniform, projects are easier to plan and costs are contained. This will make the type of housing that is built more accessible to a broader range of individuals - from low income to high income and everything in between. That is more fair, practical, and predictable for everyone.

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However, LD 2003 doesn't just propose top-down solutions. The proposed legislation also includes a robust program to help municipalities do the important technical work of updating and modernizing their land use codes. This work has long been ignored by municipal leaders either for lack of interest or, more often, a lack of available resources. With the current housing crisis, most communities now have the interest, but still don't have the resources. That is why LD 2003 would provide \$4.5 million for municipalities to encourage them to revise and modernize their land use codes consistent with encouraging housing development in their communities. By targeting \$4.5 million to municipal incentives and technical assistance, LD 2003 can help bridge the gap between where communities are and where they go. By housing it under DECD, LD 2003 helps ensure that the grantors have a broad lens as to the role of housing in our communities. DECD certainly fits that description, and to the extent the Commissioner is willing to take this on, it would go a long way toward establishing a state-level resource for housing development outside of the Maine State Housing Authority.

In short, MEREDA believes it's time for the legislature to act to pull all the levers it can to encourage housing construction in Maine. LD 2003 takes a first crucial step in that direction by implementing statewide policies and providing important financial and technical assistance to municipalities to implement fair, practical, and predictable local land use policies. Working together, these two approaches ensure immediate change to ease our housing crunch while enabling the longer-term work that will ensure stability in our housing market going forward.

Finally, we believe LD 2003 isn't the end of the conversation, but the beginning. LD 2003 has a long way to go before it is right-sized to the scale and scope of our housing crisis. MEREDA recognizes that our municipalities and other stakeholders must also have buy-in to this landmark initiative. MEREDA hopes to be involved in those conversations, and welcomes the opportunity to share any expertise or resources we may have.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and for your efforts to help solve Maine's housing crisis.

Sincerely,
Josh Fifield
MEREDA President