



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



March 7, 2022

Testimony of Commissioner Heather Johnson

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

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Heather Johnson, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). I am pleased to provide testimony 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.

Last year, the Legislature passed L.D. 609, which established the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions. The Commission brought together bipartisan legislators, leaders from various interest groups, the building trades, municipalities, advocates for affordable housing, the real estate industry, residential developers, and more.

Among its priorities, the Commission was tasked with examining housing shortages among low- and middle-income households and considering measures that would increase housing options in the state. In December, the bipartisan commission issued its comprehensive report, offering several recommendations focused on strengthening the availability of affordable, accessible housing options for Mainers.

Three years ago, we unveiled Maine's 10-year economic strategy. In that document, we detailed the major challenges facing our state – and strategies to build the diverse and sustainable economy Maine needs. One of the areas we identified as needing action was the lack of available housing options in our state. Now, with the recommendations of the *Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine*, we have another roadmap to reducing this workforce barrier.

As I have traveled the state, in-person and virtually, talking with small businesses owners, restaurateurs, workers, hospitals, local Chambers of Commerce, and others – one of the most consistent things I hear, as I'm sure you do as well, is that housing is increasingly an employment issue.

The fact of the matter is that those who want to work need to find a place to live that they can afford, within a reasonable commute of their prospective employer. In Maine's strategic economic plan, we identified that 75,000 new workers in the next decade. We need to grow much of that talent here – but we also need to attract new workers to the state. Strong in-migration numbers show that people want to move to Maine. We need to ensure that those people, and current Maine residents can find afford a place to own or rent near where they want to work.



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

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HEATHER JOHNSON
COMMISSIONER

LD 2003 would assign DECD with assisting municipalities in the development of zoning and land use ordinances. Among its responsibilities in support of this work, DECD would be tasked with developing a plan to provide technical assistance to municipalities; develop a municipal incentives program; establish a grant program; adopt and administer rules regarding affordable housing density.

This legislation is an important step toward expanding available housing options in Maine. DECD stands ready to help implement the Commission's recommendations, and thanks Speaker Fecteau for his important work to drive implementation language forward.