

130th Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Testimony of Erik C. Jorgensen, MaineHousing, in favor 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"

7 March 2022

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Erik Jorgensen, Senior Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing).

MaineHousing has been helping Maine people own, rent, repair, and heat their homes since 1969. MaineHousing is an independent state authority created to address the problems of unsafe, unsuitable, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing. We are authorized to issue bonds to finance single family mortgages for first-time homebuyers and for affordable multi-family housing.

We are also authorized to administer a number of state and federal programs including rental subsidies, weatherization, fuel assistance, two housing block grants, the low-income housing tax credit program, and homeless grant programs. We receive state general fund revenue for homeless programs and receive a dedicated portion of the real estate transfer tax for the Housing Opportunities for Maine (HOME) Fund.

I am testifying today in strong support of LD 2003. Our agency sees the policies contained in this bill as being potentially the most important opportunity to promote affordable housing in Maine to come along in a generation. Our Director, Dan Brennan, has been part of this work from the start, as a member of the Speaker's commission. His participation allowed our agency to follow and help shape the discussions surrounding the policies that were eventually included in the bill. And while there are legitimate differences of opinion about parts of this bill, taken together it presents a rare course-setting opportunity to help reduce the chronic housing shortage in this state.

Various estimates have suggested that Maine needs more than 20,000 new units of affordable housing to meet the needs that currently exist. Neither MaineHousing nor any other single entity

can provide that. If this issue is to be resolved, the solution will demand the work of many players on many fronts. While reducing zoning restrictions that hinder multi-family construction will make it easier to create traditional apartment complexes, more dispersed solutions, such as making it easier to construct accessory dwelling units, allowing small multi-units in places where single family housing is allowed, and incentivizing increases in density, are equally critical. These are all elements that can empower families and small developers to have a role in finding the solution.

This bill is an opportunity to move the state forward; it will also create an opportunity to offset some of the historical injustices that have been used in some places through land use law to exacerbate housing inequality in the past.

We have discussed this measure with various parties. One item that was raised was a suggestion to consider housing the municipal aspects of this proposal, including planning services, technical assistance and incentive programs, with the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning at the Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry. This suggestion came from a sense that the municipal planning expertise in that office was closely correlated with the measures called for in this bill.

Regardless of whether the committee heeds that suggestion, MaineHousing enthusiastically supports this important measure. We thank the Speaker for bringing the issue forward and stand by to assist however we can to move it forward.