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March 7, 2022

Senator Matthea Daughtry, Senate Chair  
Representative Mike Sylvester, House Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

RE: *Support for 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 honorable members of the committee:

I am a proud Biddeford resident writing to express support for LD 2003, a bipartisan bill sponsored by my representative, Speaker Ryan Fecteau, and to commend the members of the Commission, which made the recommendations this bill seeks to implement.

Having reviewed a sampling of the testimony submitted so far, I am concerned that some of the discussion of this bill is disconnected from the bill's purpose. The bottom line legislators must consider is this: **how do we alleviate Maine's housing affordability crisis?**

This crisis is impacting Mainers of all ages, backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. In 2020, the median home price in the state was \$265,000. The median rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$1062 per month. Half of renters paid more than 30% of their annual income on housing. These cost pressures are felt even more acutely in southern Maine. According to Realtor.com, the current median listing price for a home in Biddeford - a historically working class community - is \$350,000. We know from anecdotal reports that the limited number of homes for sale are sold quickly, often well-above the listed price. A young family with a middle class income cannot afford homeownership at these prices.

When people cannot afford to buy a home, they have to rent; this contributes to the lack of rental units available, leading to higher rents that residents cannot afford. One cause of high rents is clearly an insufficient supply of affordable rental housing. Maine needs to build 1,000 units of affordable housing per year to meet demand, and from 2014 through 2020, only 25% of that was built. We are simply not building enough affordable housing. We are not building enough housing, period.

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The commission was charged with studying one of the contributing factors to this housing crisis: zoning. Municipal zoning ordinances, many of which were enacted a long time ago in good faith, are frequently a barrier to the construction of new housing. Too much land is restricted to single-family zoning, in many communities it is not possible for homeowners to build accessory dwelling units on their own property, and some communities place arbitrary caps on growth.

Eliminating these barriers is a simple, concrete step we can take to open up new opportunities for housing. LD 2003 seeks to do just that, and importantly provides funding to assist municipalities in reviewing and improving their ordinances. It also funds incentives for municipalities to pursue greater density in housing development, a crucial component to solving this housing crunch. The bill would not eliminate all zoning - projects would need to meet safety standards and account for sewage and other environmental considerations.

Obviously, Maine has a long history of prioritizing local control - much of this history is positive. I recognize that many Maine communities understand that more needs to be done to make housing more affordable for their residents. I have been pleased with the efforts Biddeford has made in this regard. But the problem we face exists statewide and does not recognize municipal boundaries.

Therefore I believe concerns about local control raised in response to this legislation miss the point. The point is making housing more affordable for all Mainers. Doing so benefits all Mainers by encouraging our state to grow, encouraging younger Mainers to build careers and families here, and supporting lower-income Mainers and seniors on fixed incomes by ensuring that they have safe and healthy homes.

Zoning reform won't solve all of our housing problems, but it will eliminate unnecessary barriers to solving these problems, and it will result in new housing units being built, which is what we need more than anything else at this time.

I urge the committee to honor the work of the Commission and give this bipartisan bill a strong report of **Ought to Pass**.

Sincerely,

Marc G. Malon, II  
Biddeford, Maine