

Marla O'Byrne
Island Housing Trust
LD 2003

Marla O'Byrne, Executive Director
Island Housing Trust, Mount Desert Island, Maine

Senator Matthea Daughtry and Representative Michael Sylvester
Maine State Legislature, Labor and Housing Committee
Public Hearing Testimony
March 7, 2022

Dear Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and Members of the Committee,
I am the executive director of Island Housing Trust and am submitting this written testimony to neither oppose nor support LD2003, "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions."

Island Housing Trust (IHT) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit with a mission to promote viable, year-round communities by advancing permanent workforce housing on Mount Desert Island (MDI), Maine. To date we have been able to offer nearly 50 year-round homeownership opportunities, enabling our median income workforce households to break the winter/summer rental cycle and provide a stable and secure home for their families, where their children can stay in their schools and thrive. Year-round housing allows our workforce to live near where they work, to build equity for their future, and to support our local businesses year-round. A strong year-round community is important for us all, which we all know and which the pandemic has emphasized. IHT holds affordability covenants on 38 homes, and a majority of those homes were sold to buyers earning 120% or less of the state's median income.

We appreciate this focus on increasing housing opportunities for those Maine residents who cannot realistically participate in the current real estate market. As policy is considered to address this issue, I want to provide the following observations and comments. Thank you for providing this opportunity to provide input, and for considering my comments, as you consider the merits of this bill.

With regards,
Marla O'Byrne
Executive Director
Island Housing Trust

COMMENTS:

- Throughout the bill reference is made to "housing," which I believe should, and needs to, be clearly defined as "year-round housing." Maine's coastal communities are seeing an overwhelming trend of year-round housing being transitioned to vacation or short-term housing. Both are "housing." For instance, we have seen at least one local community pass a zoning ordinance allowing ADUs in a certain district, with the intent to provide additional year-round housing, affordable to low to median income renters. Unfortunately, the intention was not included as a requirement in the ordinance, and many of the ADUs became income-generating vacation rentals. I ask and recommend that any incentives given to create housing, and affordable housing, be clearly designated for year-round occupancy.
- Several communities in Maine are creating or re-invigorating nonprofit housing organizations to promote year-round housing for their community's workforce. Under Sec.7. 30-A MRSA §4364.2. Grant Program, it would be helpful to provide grants that would allow and enable municipalities to waive application and permitting fees for non-profits developing housing of which some significant percentage met the moderate income (up to 120% median income) homeownership needs.
- Sec. 9. 30-A MRSA §4364-B. 3. Long-term affordability. 3. B. "A unit will not be rented to a person for less than a 30-day period." I recommend this be expanded to ensure that the rental units meet the needs of a community's year-round, or longer-season, residents and workers. A lease term of one-year is of greater need in many of our communities to break the winter/summer rental cycle that traps so many residents in high tourist communities.
- Sec. 11. 30-A MRSA §4364-D. 3. Zoning. H. "An accessory dwelling unit may not be rented to a person for a period of less than 30 days." Again, as stated in the previous bullet, this is too short a time period to ensure availability for eligible year-round residents.