



## Town of Orono

*Testimony of Orono Town Councilor and State Representative Laurie Osher 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**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

March 7, 2022

Good morning Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. I am Laurie Osher. I have served as an Orono Town Councilor since 2017 and since 2020, I have represented the majority of Orono (District 123) in the Maine House. I am testifying in strong 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.**

Maine is experiencing a housing crisis now, and Maine was experiencing a housing crisis long before the pandemic. Orono, my town, has had a housing shortage for decades, caused in large part by restrictive zoning. In almost all of our zones, the number of units, minimum lot sizes, required road frontage and set-backs, and parking minimums either prohibit or dis-incentivize the construction of affordable housing. Year after year, the people who run for Town Council say that addressing the lack of affordable housing is one of their highest priorities. Then, year after year, the incremental changes in our zoning are so small that the only residential construction we see is for units that are too costly for people earning even the median income in our community. My town is an example that good intentions do not yield the changes Maine needs to address our housing crisis.

To quantify the crisis: There are currently 25,000 people on affordable housing wait lists statewide. To house them, we must build 1000 affordable housing units each year for the next 25 years. And how are we doing? Between 2014 and 2020, an average of 250 affordable housing units were built annually. It is clear that Orono isn't the only town where people talk about their concerns, but don't follow through. What I know is that we can't continue to do what we've done in the past and expect to achieve our goals.

Speaker Fecteau's LD 2003 was crafted by a Commission established by a bill passed in the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature. The commission heard testimony from municipal leaders and the Maine Municipal Association and proposed a state-local partnership to address the many zoning issues. LD 2003 recognizes the diversity of conditions across our state, the immediate need to increase housing in Maine, and the needs of municipalities for help with planning to address this challenge.

This bill empowers homeowners to contribute to solving Maine's housing crisis in their own backyards. For Orono, this means that single family homes can be split, can have apartments over garages, and can also have accessory dwelling units built in their yards. For Orono, this means elders living in huge homes, but on fixed incomes, can have company, assistance, and additional income, while providing housing. This means increasing density where we already have homes, and increasing population without sprawl. This is good legislation that does not infringe upon municipal oversight of local housing.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of this much needed legislation.