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March 7, 2022

Re: 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 members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM, the largest housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. Our staff of 12 works collaboratively with more than 50 different service provider organizations to house well over 1100 of Maine's most vulnerable people. I also chair the ESAC Long Term Stayers Committee which with 18 participating organizations has housed more than 384 of the longest stayers in homelessness in Maine over the last 6 ½ years, and also demonstrated that this population is as many as 45 times more likely to be in jail and 19 times more likely to be in the hospital when unhoused vs housed. Housing this population saves us a lot of money and is a game changer for each person. Our biggest problem is finding it.

I am testifying today in support of LD 2003, which would make changes to zoning and land use laws based upon the recommendations in the report of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions.

This bill would make many important changes all of which would greatly assist Maine in developing more affordable and permanent supportive housing.

Throughout State Fiscal Year 2021 (ending 6/30/21), 5,485 people experienced homelessness in Maine, and unfortunately, we know this is an undercount because many people placed in hotels were not counted. Of this group, 134 people were Long Term Stayers (LTS), or people who have experienced 180 days or more of homelessness in that twelve-month time period. Though we have made significant progress housing the longest stayers in homelessness, emergency shelters across Maine continue to be full or overflowing, simply because of the lack of housing placement options.

There is an overall shortage of affordable housing for all populations in Maine: The aggregate waiting list for affordable housing managed by state's largest apartment association has risen to more than 30,000 households; 26,000 Maine households are on waiting lists for federal rental assistance, often waiting five to ten years. Beyond that, more than 35,000 renter households, spread throughout all areas of Maine, are severely rent burdened – that is, paying more than half of their incomes for rent and utilities. This data is as of 2019 – it has likely worsened since, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the sharp increase in cost of housing. Additionally, Maine has the oldest population, and some of the oldest housing stock, in the nation. There is an extraordinary unmet demand for affordable, quality housing for all populations, as well as supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness and with other special needs. Maine greatly needs affordable and supportive housing.

In the past few years, resources have only allowed for about 180 affordable housing units a year to come online, and closer to 12 each year for supportive housing. That's less than 20% of what we need to turn this around. MaineHousing is increasing resources toward this, but we will need other tools as well, and key among them is streamlining zoning and permit processes and lifting land use restrictions to open the doors for developing vital affordable and supportive housing, which is exactly what this bill would do, by:

- Amending fair housing provisions of the Maine Human Rights Act, and prohibiting municipalities and government entities from using these criteria to restrict the construction or development of housing accommodations in any area;
- Establishing the Municipal Housing Development Permit Review Board, which would be responsible for the review of municipal housing development permit decisions;



- Prohibiting municipalities from adopting any ordinance that caps the number of building or development permits each year for any kind of residential dwellings;
- Developing a program to provide technical assistance to municipalities for the purposes of developing and implementing zoning and land use ordinances;
- Implementing a program to provide grants to municipalities for the purposes of contracting for services and hiring staff to help administer municipal responsibilities in developing and implementing zoning and land use ordinances, appropriating \$1,294,680 for that program in fiscal year 2022-23;
- Creating an incentive program that a municipality may participate in for up to 3 years and receive grants of up to \$25,000 per year for fulfilling certain requirements related to reviewing how its zoning and land use ordinances may impact the availability of housing;
- Defining "affordable housing development," requiring municipalities to allow affordable housing developments to be built at certain densities and setting certain criteria to ensure that an affordable housing development remains affordable for at least 30 years;
- Requiring, for any zone in which housing is permitted, that a municipality permit structures with up to 4 dwelling units and creating general requirements for municipal ordinances governing residential zones;
- Beginning April 20, 2023, requiring municipalities to allow the construction of accessory dwelling units, setting out specific requirements for the permitting and construction of accessory dwelling units; and
- Requiring that a municipality designate an area within the municipality as a priority development zone, which is defined as a zone in which multifamily housing is permitted at a greater density and requiring the priority development zone to be located in an area that has significant potential for housing development and is located near community resources.

All of these changes would assist Maine in increasing its ability to create new affordable and supportive housing. The changes to zoning, permitting, and land use restriction would also allow for the creation of permanent supportive housing for long term homeless populations - the group that costs the system far more to serve while unhoused.

Please support LD 2003, which would significantly help Maine end long term and chronic homelessness by allowing for a more streamlined, uniform process for developing housing for the few hundred people who need it most.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.