



Raise-Op Housing Cooperative
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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 Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Craig Saddlemyre, I am a resident of Lewiston and the Cooperative Development Organizer for the Raise-Op Housing Cooperative. We currently operate 15 units of owner-occupied, affordable housing, and we want to see everyone in our state affordably housed. That's why I am here today to testify in favor of LD 2003.

The housing crisis we are facing is severe, urgent, and growing as we speak. It will take numerous policies and actions to truly address our housing challenges in an effective and comprehensive way.

LD 2003 is an extremely important and effective component to a comprehensive housing strategy because it addresses the issue of buildable land and scalable solutions.

LD 2003 improves zoning conditions statewide to make building new homes easier, by making more residential zones buildable for homes beyond the single-family dwelling. These zoning changes make it possible for individual homeowners and small-time developers to be a part of our housing solution, along next to the large professional housing developers.

As an example, consider the homeowner who wants to make a small profit to help pay their own housing costs, or wants to provide a decent home for their elders, or a local college student. They can easily handle the management of that unit in their backyard, but when implemented on a statewide level this can have an important impact on housing availability. Imagine if just 10% of homeowners in Maine added one modest dwelling unit to their property, we could have 54,000 new affordable homes in Maine. If some of those same owners convert their properties to 4-unit buildings, the impact can go even further.

At the same time, this bill also creates the opportunity to develop larger multi-unit properties restricted for low-income renters, who are most at-risk and who we - as a state - need to provide stable housing for the benefit of our communities and economy.

Maine has a lot of land served by quality public infrastructure that is subsidized by local and state tax dollars, but due to unreasonable and discriminatory zoning traditions, much of this land has been preserved for our most affluent homeowners and vacationers. This zoning is discriminatory and exclusionary to people who are low-income, BIPOC, and living with disability. We need every community to play a role in providing affordable homes so that no one is displaced from their community due to lack of housing options. Furthermore, it is not feasible to meet our growing housing demands by confining new housing development to a handful of



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concentrated urban centers. These dense metropolitan areas are part of the solution, but cannot meet our housing demands on their own. If we are serious about this problem, we need more buildable land.

For homeowners in low-density suburban neighborhoods concerned about change, they must keep in mind that change is a part of life, and many of us in Maine are dealing with extreme changes of which you may have no idea how extremely our lives are being impacted. Imagine dealing with the change of becoming homeless, couch surfing, or living in overpriced motels while you raise a child and work full-time as a waiter, retail clerk, school janitor, or nurse's assistant. Or imagine losing your home because of an unexpected illness and expensive medical bills. Multi-unit properties can meet the needs of Mainers by providing the density required to make a project economically sustainable. Every person needs and deserves a stable, affordable place to call home, and our economy relies on this need being met. Homelessness, transience, and lack of workforce housing leads to public costs with regards to policing, emergency room visits, and labor shortages.

And let us address the common defense against such zoning changes. The term "preserving the character of community" has traditionally been a racist and classist code, for "keeping our community white and upper middle class." When it comes to building aesthetics, multi-unit buildings can be designed to compliment the traditional architecture of the surrounding community, and these design characteristics can remain in-tact, while still allowing for the necessary unit density. But we must not allow "preserving the racial and social class" of a community to be an acceptable argument against new housing development. Such thinking is discriminatory and - when practiced as policy - a violation of the Maine Human Rights Act.

Our housing crisis is a statewide problem, and we need every community to play its part. LD 2003 is an important step in this process. I urge your support for LD 2003.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Saddle mire". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Craig Saddle mire
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