



**Testimony 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**

**To the Committee on Labor and Housing  
by Jack Shapiro, Climate & Clean Energy Program Director  
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Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, Members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Jack Shapiro, I'm the Climate and Clean Energy Program Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and I'm here to testify 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.

The Natural Resources Council of Maine is a nonprofit membership organization of more than 25,000 supporters and has been dedicated to preserving Maine's environment for more than 60 years. I start with that introduction because NRCM does not often testify in front of this committee. But as the commendable work of the Housing Commission and the Committee have made clear, there is a strong connection between addressing our housing issues and solutions to the climate crisis.

The zoning restrictions that are the focus of this bill limit the development of affordable housing and housing supply overall, but they also contribute to the carbon emissions driving climate change. Modernizing Maine's housing and zoning policies can help alleviate the expensive dependence on cars and commutes that result in the transportation sector representing the largest sector source of Maine's greenhouse gas pollution.

Many exclusionary zoning policies that limit the amount and type of housing that can be built have deeply unfortunate roots in discriminatory housing policies from the 20<sup>th</sup> century – designed by many communities to keep certain races or classes of people concentrated elsewhere. These policies limit housing supply, driving up costs, but also have major impacts on equity in terms of access to good schools, economic opportunity, and more. The connection to climate is that more spread-out sprawling development driven by housing policy was also facilitated by government-subsidized road-building and then-cheap fossil fuels, leading to both a climate-intensive and costly car-focused transportation system, and expensive housing.

So if we hope to do our part to address climate change in Maine, we have to go beyond limiting our thinking to solar panels and electric vehicles. While renewable energy and end-use electrification are important, we need to think comprehensively about how we build and develop – and redevelop – our communities.

The policies included in this bill, if implemented, could have a big impact on successfully meeting the climate goals laid out by the Legislature and our state's Climate Action Plan, as well as reducing pollution and creating healthier communities. For example:

- More housing options give people the choice to live closer to jobs and services, reducing commutes, trips, and transportation costs.
- More development focused in towns, villages, and cities reduces development pressure on forestland and farmland, preserving those landscapes inherent value, and their ability to capture and store carbon.
- Communities where residents live closer to work, school, and services are more resilient, especially when they experience disruptions from more frequent and severe extreme weather – itself a result of climate change.
- More compact communities lower the costs of infrastructure for cities and towns, and increase the viability of transit, giving more Mainers the choice to use lower-cost and lower-emission transportation options.
- Living closer to schools and stores lets people live healthier lives with options to walk or bike on sidewalks or trails to the places we need to go.

As others will testify, it is important that we take a close look at this bill to ensure that encouraging housing development doesn't necessarily mean building new housing everywhere. For new housing to help meet climate goals and preserve natural resources and working lands, it should be focused on areas near services, schools, and infrastructure, not the outskirts of communities where increased transportation costs and pollution offset lower housing costs and climate benefits.

In closing, we believe that housing is a climate issue as well as an affordability and an equity issue, and this bill will take several positive steps forward. We appreciate the Committee's attention to this issue, and we encourage your support for this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.