

Mayor O'Brien, Augusta
Mayor Casavant, Biddeford
Mayor Sheline, Lewiston
Mayor Snyder, Portland
Mayor Glaser, Rockland



Mayor Doyle, Saco
Mayor Mastraccio, Sanford
Mayor Dhalac, South Portland
Mayor Foley, Westbrook

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

Presented by Mayor Carl Sheline
March 7, 2022

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Carl Sheline, Mayor of Lewiston, and I am testifying on behalf of the Mayors' Coalition in support of LD 2003.

The Mayors' Coalition is a nonpartisan group formed in 2012, and currently includes the Mayors of nine Maine communities - Augusta, Biddeford, Lewiston, Portland, Rockland, Saco, Sanford, South Portland, and Westbrook – with a combined population of nearly 250,000. The Coalition advocates for state and federal policies that recognize the important role that Maine cities play in providing vital services to people across our state, and the positive impact our cities have on the economic strength of our state.

We commend Speaker Fecteau for his leadership on this issue and the efforts of the Commission and this Committee. As with so many long-standing crises, there is no silver bullet solution. We need every level of government focused on addressing this crisis and employing a full range of solutions, from providing funding to create new units, to adopting policies that remove barriers to creating housing. This bill is a necessary part of the solution.

The severe lack of housing affordable to so many Maine people is a complex problem that has been building for at least two decades. **In 2002**, Maine State Housing Authority issued a report that states:

“Maine faces an unprecedented challenge in developing affordable housing for its young people and retirees at a time when federal resources for housing are at a low ebb. The people of Maine spoke this past year by passing a \$12 million affordable housing bond. We will leverage this with other resources and help hundreds of Maine individuals and families, but this will only scratch the surface of the need.

Beyond the question of resources, we must deal with the problem of attitude. The Not-In-My-Back-Yard (NIMBY) syndrome is, unfortunately, alive and well in Maine. We at Maine State Housing Authority are working closely with the State Planning Office to promote “sensible growth” alternatives to providing affordable housing that reduce the need for automobile use and preserve open space and environmental quality.”¹ (emphasis added)

¹ The State of Maine's Housing 2002, Maine State Housing Authority, September, 2002 at p. 1, *available at* <https://mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/state-of-maine's-housing-2002---presented-@-the-2002-governor's-affordable-housing-conference.pdf?sfvrsn=4&sfvrsn=4>

Here we are, 20 years later, having made too little progress and facing a much more severe housing crisis. It is time to take a more direct approach and to provide more substantial funding to address our housing needs.

This bill establishes state standards to ensure a range of housing types are allowed across Maine and provides resources to municipalities to support their efforts to modernize their land use regulations. As Mayor of Rockland, Ed Glaser, recently said, “Too often, local zoning looks to the past, and we need to find ways to look ahead.” While as local elected officials we value local control, this statewide crisis is deserving of a coordinated effort to remove land use barriers to the creation of housing. We simply have too many constituents unable to afford housing for themselves and their families.

While we support LD 2003, we do have some concerns that the bill as currently drafted could encourage or even require low-density sprawl into open and agricultural land and in areas without the existing infrastructure to support housing. We encourage Speaker Fecteau and the Committee to consider amending the bill to ensure that while we meet our housing goals, we also maintain our commitment to sound planning principles that preserve open and agricultural land, consider where infrastructure exists, and honors our commitment to sustainable development to achieve our Climate goals. We stand ready to work with Speaker Fecteau and this Committee in ensuring these goals are met.

Thank you for your time and consideration.