



Testimony in Support of LD 161, Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Laws

Before the Committee on Housing and Economic Development

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Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director and Staff Scientist at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 24,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 161, Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Laws.

Urban sprawl is one of the greatest threats facing the natural resources and wildlife of Maine today. When development activities are not adequately planned in a comprehensive manner, it is often the environment that pays the price. Whether it's the destruction of habitat through deforestation to make new single-family residential lots, the degradation of water quality due to increased stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces, an increase in wildlife strikes from cars due to an expansion of the road network, or an increase in the wastewater load processed by treatment plants in areas with growing populations, development decisions have direct impacts to the natural environment around us and therefore need to be made with care.

Subdivision laws are valuable tools that municipalities have to help them manage growth in smart and sustainable ways. Currently, Maine's subdivision laws are not equipped to address the development pressures facing the state. Maine's population grew at a rate more than twice the national average from 2021 to 2022,¹ and this increase is projected to continue in the future.² This will make existing problems like the lack of affordable housing, the overall housing shortage, and urban sprawl even worse if action is not taken.

By convening a stakeholder group to review existing subdivision laws and provide recommendations on how those laws can be changed to promote development in growth areas, reduce development pressure in rural areas, protect public safety and welfare, advance state goals to produce affordable housing, and streamline the development review process, this bill will start the much needed process of amending current laws to meet today's challenges. While we support all the elements that the stakeholder group is charged with in the current version of the bill, we

¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/09/14/maines-population-growth-outpaces-national-average/>

² https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov/dafs/economist/files/inline-files/Maine%20Population%20Outlook%20to%202030_0.pdf

strongly recommend that the bill language be amended so that the conservation of natural resources is explicitly stated as one of the goals of the subdivision law overhaul. The health of our forests, waters, wildlife, and fisheries is an integral part of the quality of life of Mainers and therefore should be considered by this legislation. We also recommend that the membership of the stakeholder group be expanded to include a representative of the natural resource conservation community and a representative of the nonprofit land use planning community for this same reason.

Maine has a proven track record of being at the forefront of public policy with regards to healthcare, the environment, and climate, among other areas. It's time that our land use regulations and policies catch up to ensure that future generations of Mainers can secure affordable housing and enjoy the natural resources that make our state great.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 161. Thank you for your time and consideration.