



## Better zoning laws can make every Maine community more affordable and welcoming to people from all walks

LD 1673 and LD 2003 would take steps to improve Maine's zoning laws to encourage housing affordability and help reverse segregation and exclusion in our cities and towns.

Zoning laws are rules that determine how different areas of a city or town can be used (like residential zones where people live and commercial zones for businesses). **Zoning laws shape our communities and our lives, because where we live makes a big difference in how we live.** Housing affects who has access to good schools and nice parks, who gets to live in safe and healthy places, and who can be close to good job opportunities.

### Zoning and racial and economic equity connect

Traveling across Maine, it doesn't take long to notice **economic and racial segregation in our state, much like the rest of the country.** Low-income Mainers know especially what it's like to be forced to find housing in the most under-resourced communities, which often have substandard housing and limited economic opportunity. [Research shows](#) that when people with low income can move to mixed-income communities, **parents are healthier and happier and their kids have better education and employment outcomes** as they grow up.

Zoning laws have **historically been used to separate people based on wealth and race**, something that is often called "exclusionary zoning." For example, U.S. and Maine zoning laws have segregated neighborhoods based on income, prevented the building of affordable housing, and pushed affordable and low-income housing into areas with poorer air quality, closer to highways, and farther away from city services.



### A mother, employer, and landlord calls for zoning change

"We *must* change our zoning laws if we are serious about solving the housing crisis.

Many years ago, I experienced the fear of homelessness as a single parent with two small children.

Now I'm an employer and a landlord in a part of the state that is increasingly unaffordable.

We've pushed people to have to live further and further from good jobs, opportunities, and services. **Maine people deserve safe, affordable housing."**

*-Cheryl Golek, Harpswell, Housing Commission member*

In practice, these **exclusions happen when zoning laws prevent** apartments from being built in many areas, when they require large minimum lot sizes or a minimum number of parking spaces, or other space requirements, to limit the amount of housing that can be built.

## Why we're supporting LD 1673 and LD 2003, two bills to help make Maine's zoning laws more fair

While zoning is usually thought of as a local issue, the state can set sensible standards across Maine's communities. All over the country, cities and towns are removing zoning barriers that don't make sense and providing new incentives and technical support for communities to embrace change. **Step by step, these changes will create more opportunity for people with diverse economic and racial backgrounds** to live where they couldn't afford to before.

- **LD 1673**, *An Act To Create a Comprehensive Permit Process for the Construction of Affordable Housing*, would support housing construction in every town in Maine. It would give towns incentives to set a goal to have a certain percentage of affordable housing, simplify the permit process for affordable housing development, and create a new affordable housing committee that could review decisions that deny a permit to build affordable housing.
- **LD 2003**, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions*, would put into law the recommendations of a recent state commission representing diverse housing stakeholders that studied Maine's zoning laws. It would provide density bonuses for more affordable housing to be built where it's most accessible, remove annual caps on housing, and offer incentives and technical assistance to municipalities to build more affordable housing. It would also permit families to build "accessory dwelling units" on their land and build up to four units on a residential lot, with few restrictions.

Together, the changes in these bills will **help increase home ownership and allow all families greater access to economic opportunities**. LD 1673 and LD 2003 take the first steps needed to build a future where Maine neighborhoods have greater diversity in types of housing and levels of household income, and create better access to public services for people of all races and income levels.