



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Committee on Labor and Housing

From: Jonathan Fulford, Sierra Club Maine

Date: May 6, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of L.D. 1656 **An Act to Build Energy Efficient Affordable Housing**

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and Members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing. I am Jonathan Fulford, a career builder and lifelong environmental advocate, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club Maine's over 20,000 members and supporters. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we defend everyone's right to a healthy world, and we strongly support L.D. 1656 in our pursuit of that mission.

Environmental issues not only affect our natural landscape; they impact people. The climate crisis influences our jobs and our communities. As such, intersectional problems require intersectional solutions. Indeed, L.D. 1656 uses investment in affordable housing to create more housing, create more jobs, and mitigate the climate crisis in a just manner.

Maine needs at least 20,000 more housing units, and our current housing stock is a driver of greenhouse gas emissions. The housing provided from this bill will move Maine closer to the energy efficiency standards we need to address the climate crisis. Energy efficiency continues to be one of the most effective ways at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. With lower demand comes lower supply. It also opens up the opportunity for more local, decentralized smart grids. And that, too, has a great impact on Maine's labor force issues -- sustainable building is a major growth industry and this funding will create more good construction jobs in Maine and grow the scale of green building and streamline supply chains.

We need to scale up our energy efficiency efforts and build our green building workforce. We are also short on skilled, good-paying jobs. This bill would result in the responsible construction of energy-efficient affordable housing to help address Maine's housing shortage at the scale that is needed -- \$100 million over two years. The housing will be developed with project labor agreements in place that will raise working standards for construction trades and expand our registered apprenticeship programs.

By raising the wages and benefits of these highly-skilled jobs and growing the pipeline of skilled workers, we can ease Maine's affordable housing shortage today while making progress toward meeting Maine's long-term and growing need for skilled green building experts, and good jobs with fair pay and great benefits.

L.D. 1656 addresses several crises at once, and will have significant economic multiplier effects: Each dollar invested in affordable housing boosts local economies by leveraging public and private resources to generate income including resident earnings and additional local tax revenue and supports job creation and retention.

We urge Ought to Pass for L.D. 1656.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Fulford
Legislative Team Chair
Sierra Club Maine