



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Joint Committee on Labor and Housing

From: Patricia Rubert-Nason, Sierra Club Maine

Date: February, 9, 2022

Re: Testimony Neither for Nor Against LD 1884 - An Act To Create Affordable Agricultural Homesteads

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and Members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Patricia Rubert-Nason, and I write on behalf of Sierra Club and the over 20,000 members and supporters in Maine. 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 nationwide as we defend everyone's right to a healthy world. While the aim of this bill is good, we are concerned that it may have unintended consequences. We would encourage the committee to explore options for allowing the development of affordable agricultural homesteads, without opening agricultural land for non-agricultural development.

The need for more affordable housing in Maine is pressing. And zoning laws can, and do, present a significant barrier to developing that housing. However, our prime agricultural land is also a limited resource. According to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, only 13% of land in Maine is suitable for agriculture.¹ LD 1884 would prohibit income requirements (in all zones) and severely limit restrictions on lot size in agricultural zones without providing any protections to prevent non-agricultural development. As written, this would require many communities to allow very small lot sizes (well under an acre) in agricultural zones. While the Sierra Club fully supports the desire to facilitate the construction of affordable housing and to enable the development of small homesteads where families can raise food and animals, we are concerned that the bill, as written, would remove options for communities to protect their agricultural land from development and open the floodgates to placing subdivisions and other non-agricultural development on land that is zoned for agricultural use.

Prime farmland in Maine is a very limited resource. We need to protect it. At the same time, we also need to create opportunities for small farms and homesteads and for the

1

<https://bangordailynews.com/2021/10/16/homestead/maine-is-in-danger-of-losing-some-of-its-best-agricultural-land-to-solar-farms-joam40zk0w/>

development of affordable housing. We would encourage the committee to explore options for allowing the development of small farms without opening up agricultural land to development for non-agricultural uses. Separately we would encourage the committee to explore options for encouraging infill development to help create more affordable housing while relieving development pressure on agricultural land.

Respectfully,
Patricia Rubert-Nason
Legislative Team Volunteer