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Testimony by Jeff Levine for GrowSmart Maine  
in support of LD 1257 "An Act To Encourage Inclusionary Zoning in  
Municipalities by Increasing Revenue Sharing"

April 15, 2021

Senator Chipman, Representative Terry, and Members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Taxation, I live in Portland and I am an urban planner serving on the Board of GrowSmart Maine. I have worked in New England on planning and housing issues for over 25 years. Currently, I own Levine Planning Strategies and serve on the faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where I research and teach economic development, zoning, and housing planning.

GrowSmart Maine is a statewide organization devoted to revitalizing historic neighborhoods and vibrant communities suited for residents of all ages, to foster entrepreneurs and creative thinkers, and to provide a safe and inclusive place to raise children. We advocate for policies and projects that advance Maine's business and economic growth and development in balance with the conservation and enrichment of our greatest assets; the beautiful and productive built and natural environments that are the bedrock of our cultural and economic heritage. We support the continuation of traditional livelihoods like fishing, farming and forestry; keeping Maine families working their heritage and making it possible for their children to do the same. In addition, we provide leadership by convening a broad range of voices in meaningful conversations on how to arrive at common-sense solutions as united Mainers. Our goal is to ensure that future generations can prosper and choose to call Maine home.

We are writing to offer our thoughts on LD 1257 "An Act To Encourage Inclusionary Zoning in Municipalities by Increasing Revenue Sharing." We generally support the idea of providing additional revenue sharing for communities that help achieve state and regional housing goals. This additional revenue not only will reward communities for doing the right thing – it also will help assuage concerns that additional housing may produce additional financial needs beyond what a community might collect in property taxes.

While we support the bill and would recommend its passage, as drafted it leaves some questions that should be resolved.

Specifically:

- We recommend using a different term for what is referred to as “inclusionary zoning” in this bill, as that is generally a term of art referring to a specific zoning strategy. As used in this bill, the term is more flexible. A term such as “Smart and Equitable Growth district” would work well;
- Whatever it is called, the definition of what is currently called “inclusionary zoning” needs refinement, either in the text of the bill or through rulemaking. In particular, terms like “permitting workforce development” should be clarified to ensure that the benefits are tangible;
- The “Inclusionary Zoning Fund” should similarly be referred to with a different term, such as “Smart and Equitable Growth Fund”;
- The distribution formula for this fund should factor in not just the population of each community, but what percentage of the community is covered under these districts.

Thanks for the opportunity to offer our comments on this bill.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JL', is positioned above the name 'Jeff Levine, AICP'.

Jeff Levine, AICP